

# LA VOZ HISTÓRICA EN LA POESÍA INGLESA (1985-2005)

TESIS DOCTORAL

Vol. 2

Fuentes primarias

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## IRON AGE

Peter Redgrove (1932-2003) - *Assembling a Ghost* (1996)

As they worked the meteorite with silex hammers,  
'Your knives - where are they obtained?'  
Asked Cortez of the Aztec chiefs,  
Who simply pointed upwards, to the sky.

Meteoric iron was the valuta, superseding gold,  
Aeroliths weighted with stellar sanctity skidding to earth,  
Ore speeding from elsewhere, trophy of the beyond;

And the one who makes a sword,  
Beating the iron fallen from heaven into stars,  
Is naturally invulnerable as those stars; and this Smith  
Strikes his anvil so that nature feels

Through all her pores the enormous revelry.

## River History

Lavinia Greenlaw (1962) - *Night Photograph* (1993)

Even then the river carried cargo,  
Saxon corn shipped to storehouses on the Rhine.  
Taxes were paid in pepper and cloth by the Easterlings,  
the German merchants trading from the Steelyard  
demolished in the fire of 1666.  
Wharves burned like touchpaper, packed  
with resin, sulphur, pitch.  
The daily catch between London and Deptford  
was salmon, eel, smelt and plaice  
but the Port Authority preferred to dine  
at the Tavern on the best turtle soup in the City  
as they argued the height of the wall to be built  
against the Mudlarks, Plunderers and Peterboatmen,  
intent on their nightly specialized percentage:  
cloves from Zanzibar, mother-of-pearl,  
tortoiseshell, South American iodine,  
West Indian rum, the heavy iron bottles  
of Spanish quicksilver, and, from Ivory House,  
the occasional mammoth tusk unfrozen in Siberia.  
The Empire expanded, cess-pits were banned,  
water grew thick with steamships and sewage  
and the docks pushed east out into the marshes,  
breaking the horizon with a forest of cranes  
that unloaded meat, cloth, tobacco and grain  
from countries my school atlas still colours pink.  
At the Crutched Friars Deposit Office records were kept  
of ships in berth, noted daily  
by a row of clerks crouched under gaslight  
and seven-foot ceilings. Records were kept  
of each member of the Union, the fight to be paid  
a tanner an hour and not have to climb each day  
on another's back and shout to be chosen.  
There was always the army.  
The Luftwaffe bombed Surrey Commercial Docks  
for fifty-seven nights and the timber blazed  
for more days than most people kept counting.

Even when every magnetic mine  
had been located and cleared, there were dangers.  
Centuries of waste had silted the river  
till the water ran black over Teddington weir  
and a bag of rubbish thrown from London Bridge  
took six weeks to ride a dying current  
out to the estuary. No swimming, no fish,  
and those who fell in had to be sluiced out.  
No ships, no work. The industry found itself  
caught in the net of passing time,  
watching mile after mile of dockland fill  
with silence and absence. Land changed hands  
in an estate agent's office, short-lease premises  
with 'Upstream' and 'Downstream' carved above the doors.  
Now the tidal traffic is a slow weekday flow of cars  
channeled into streets built before cars were thought of.  
They inch round corners, nudge against kerbs,  
then settle tight packed against the pavement.  
On Butler's Wharf, the only machinery  
now in daily use is the tow-away truck:  
cruising yellow lines, it pauses to hoist  
the solid engineering of a badly parked BMW  
into the air with illogical ease.  
In Coriander Building, an agency  
maintains the plants, the colour scheme is neutral  
but the smell of new paint has yet to sink in,  
like the spice that still seasons the air after rain.  
A film crew arrives, on a costly location shoot  
for *Jack the Ripper*. It's a crowded night.  
Intent on atmosphere, they've cluttered the alleys  
with urchins, trollops and guttersnipes  
who drift to the waterfront when they're not working  
and gaze across at the biggest, emptiest office block in Europe  
and its undefendable, passing light.

## The Other England

Tom Paulin (1949) - *Walking a Line* (1994)

- 1 Just as Charles Stuart
- 2 ---that virus in the body politic
- 3 hid his rebel presence
- 4 in an oak tree
- 5 while troopers scoured the woods
- 6 after the battle of Worcester
- 7 so the evil essence
- 8 of all things royal
- 9 when it came to oust
- 10 the new republic
- 11 perched upon a tree
- 12 *the middle tree and highest*
- 
- 13 now the shade of John Milton
- 14 asks how long will the loyal
- 15 citizens of Britain
- 16 go on bending the knee
- 17 to a scraggy vulture
- 18 that feasts on a spent tampon
- 19 and a dead dick?

## HISTORY

Roland John (1940) - *To Weigh Alternatives* (1994)

To start with air pure and the streams undammed  
a landscape still to be parcelled and broken by walls,  
not yet the time of high halls, old men  
and warriors' calls in the fields of battle.

But the beginning of terror, of loneliness, the panic  
before darkness, victims of rocks, the Great Tree  
rustling, the terrible sounds from the sea, black spells,  
can trips for victory in the caves of the hunters.

Later spears and the bleached, ground bones on the shore  
Troy fallen and the beaked ships scattered  
over ocean, landless men battered, proud captains lost,  
it mattered little, innocence over, history's begun.,

The clan time, family feuds, dynasties rise,  
kings laid low, politics and intrigue, the upward  
curve to the electric future, where bored with satiety  
men in high halls hoard the relics of Troy's last kings.

Now time of gombeen men, bankers, jobbers and freaks,  
sure tricksters all and still brassy with power  
but without a hero's pain, a dour crew of showmen  
who would still cower before any god you care to name.

## The Sculpture Museum in February

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *The Wound-dresser's Dream* (1996)

It was warm behind the glass,  
the sun a swung lure

chandeliers filmed with muslin,  
marble bodies flowing against the light

so many sexual positions  
ghosted in the huge milky mirrors

and outside, the rococo garden,  
a gardener opening the soil.

## Millennium

Patricia Beer (1919-1999) - *Autumn* (1997)

- 1 A thousand times travelling over these fields,
- 2 Shorn as if shamed, the shortest day
- 3 Has yellowed and gone, yomping to new year.
- 4 From a Wessex window we have watched it.
- 5 We mull over the millennium. Not many days now.
  
- 6 This time ten centuries ago
- 7 (Romans retired, Normans not ready)
- 8 Saxons had come here to settle, not swallow or govern.
- 9 Vain in vigour they vowed this hill would suit them.
- 10 Wood served these warlords wonderfully for dwelling.
- 11 They lived off the land, lopping the trees
- 12 That soared again in the same spot, as mead-halls
- 13 Where warriors wilted, weapons erect beside them.
- 14 They snored, serging and slumping with the verse,
- 15 Pleased the poet. They performed his rhythm.
- 16 Bats burst in out of a burning night sky
- 17 Like stars scorched and scattered over Middle-earth.
  
- 18 At sunrise they would set out to seek more land,
- 19 Claiming Cornwall, calling its fields after themselves.
- 20 Half-foemen, half farmers, they frisked like centaurs
- 21 On the Roman road that rang through Exeter,
- 22 Till moors muffled them and mists sent wandering.
  
- 23 Paganism was patchy but powerful nonetheless
- 24 Giving new greatness to the goddess Easter.
- 25 Kings of Wessex were Christians, counting their years
- 26 From the birth. Backsliders, brought home by carols
- 27 Each winter, kept Woden but worshipped one God.
  
- 28 Fifty fathers-and-sons fill this place,
- 29 Heroes hidden in earth or hoarded offshore
- 30 Tombed with their treasures till tides parted them
- 31 They left us language and lymph, verse
- 32 Made of sibling sounds and strong heartbeats.
- 33 We have always talked of lasting till Two Thousand.
- 34 From January on we could join them, justly,



- 35 For now comes Nunc Dimittis, if needed.
- 36 It is dispiriting to dodge death for ever.

*A Maybe Day in Kazakhstan* (1994) - Tony Harrison

Flea-market

A city wall not quite sure where,  
no May Day posters plastered there.  
Although it's May Day no parade  
disturbs the new free world of trade,  
only the memory of a choir  
and from it one voice rising higher  
out of a red doll standing near a  
man who bows a Black Sea *lyra*.

The *lyra* man

I seek directions from the man  
who welcomes me to 'Kazakhstan!'

What sometimes haunts these traders' looks  
are dark nights and days in cattle trucks.

Cold dark deportation trains  
still jolt and judder through their brains.

From Black Sea coast to Kazakhstan  
cooped up in a cattle van.

Confined to Kazakhstan and far  
from Sukhumi and Krasnodar.

May Day comes and haunts a man  
with memories of Kazakhstan.

Red flags he flogs for what he can  
once flew high in 'Kazakhstan!'

Flag-seller

This flea market that's now free  
from surveillance by the KGB,  
though things to aid the human eye  
take aim, surveyor even spy  
are all part of this pavement trade  
police no longer keep surveyed.  
The free market, seller/buyer  
of tablecloths and *Stolichnaya*,  
hats made of Siberian furs,  
and surplus Soviet secateurs  
we see flea-market browsers feel  
to test the sharpness of the steel.



	<p>Maybe they once cut the wire that put barbed confines round a choir, not for pruning plants but man collectivized in Kazakhstan.</p>	not in black boots and on parade .	Old woman knitting
Red dolls	<p>They seem to sell these everywhere as talismans against despair, these little dolls on every stall no force seems able to make fall. The doll, no matter what the drop, 'll come up trilling from her topple, cling to her song and go on clinging though Kazakhstan could crush her singing, collectivized and forced by rote to still the <i>lyra</i> in her throat.</p>		Gas masks
Tools and spare parts	<p>We see in these flea-market scenes all the system's stilled machines, the bit, the drill, the cog, the gear, the technology of yesteryear. The hammer once gripped in the fist of Stakhanovite and Stalinist or cast in gold as an award for greater output quotas scored. The Stakhanovites have all downed tools and live by new free-market rules. And no red flags to stitch or darn means surpluses of scarlet yarn. The people's flags of deepest red novel coverlets to drape a bed. And uniforms have been sloughed off, redundant after Gorbachev, mere novelties a trader peddles, not in Red Square impaled with medals bouncing on breasts as brass bands play marchers and missiles through May Day</p>		Radiation meters
Red Anny uniforms	<p>This march-past's only shoppers' feet browsing on flea-market street in various shoes, high heels or suede,</p>		Toy xylophone

She sees their  
feet from  
where she's  
sitting on the  
pavement,  
peddling,  
knitting.  
And  
maybe  
all her  
bright  
bootees  
will  
walk  
to  
better  
times  
than  
these,  
not crash  
their heels  
to May  
Day brass  
as  
medalled  
smilers  
watch  
them  
pass, not  
keep in  
step, or  
form in  
ranks  
and march as  
boots in front of  
tanks.  
And maybe  
the head that  
wears this  
bonnet won't

ever need a gas mask on it...

The Kazakhstan these masks come  
from was the test site for the Soviet  
bomb. And choristers in gas masks gag  
and can't perform the People's  
Flag. The most you'll ever get  
from them  
's a fearful muffled requiem.  
The metronome these masks  
employ gets sold here as a  
gruesome toy.  
These meters dumped in great amounts  
measure radiation counts.

Army issue anti-gas  
and army surplus May Day brass  
some Kazakh or Uzbek brigade  
marched past with playing on  
parade.

They need a new tune to  
redeem the redness of the old  
regime.

The tune we hear three browsers play  
still haunts them though it's had its  
day.

Pavement peddlers trading  
trash from Communism's fatal  
crash, salvaging the washed  
up cargo  
from their ill-fated, shattered *Argo*,  
spewing from its kitsch-crammed  
hold debris to be bought and sold,  
and all that spewed-up spillage  
sprawls on these pathetic pavement  
stalls.

Lenin	<p>Doomed Argonauts condemned to peddle the bric-à-brac of badge and medal from that doomed voyage that maroons Lenin here with fork and spoons, cast in bronze now cast away to read <i>Das Kapital</i> all day. Most stalls sell his statuette (though I haven't seen one bought here yet), this mannikin time's mummified in philosophical formaldehyde, and behind bronze Vladimir Ilyich (once you've pressed his little switch) there, in strange surgical disguise, Dr Trotsky rolls his eyes drinking his prescribed solution, only his eyes in revolution and that by no means permanent once Dr Trotsky's battery's spent. And Trotsky drinks and drinks and drinks because the new free market stinks. Though New World Order mongers crow that History's got nowhere to go and make the socialist despair it's ever going anywhere, the New World Order thinks we're wiser when every man's a merchandiser. But Trotsky goes on making toasts to <i>glasnost</i> and the gulag ghosts. The foundered <i>Argo's</i> former crew now peddling here on pavements new, marooned in free flea-market forces with no sights fixed on future courses, what new horizons do they scan, these castaways from Kazakhstan?</p> <p>They scan the market where they are, not Sukhumi or Krasnodar... and not Georgia, Georgia Tblis (Tbilisi, Georgia) but Greece - not the Black Sea coast Sukhum</p>	Acropolis	<p>but to Athens, Greece that they've all come. This market wasn't Kazakhstan but where democracy began two millennia and a half ago which makes its progress pretty slow.</p>
Trotsky		Athinas Street, Athens	<p>This flea-market Athens street is where a dream and nightmare meet. These peddlers, Greeks, once deportees to Kazakhstan, call Kleisthenes, democracy's first dreamer, kin (a dream they want including in) so come to Greece to reconnect and salvage lives that Stalin wrecked and get to feel like Greeks again, though Greeks still call them Soviet men, forced out of Georgia and displaced from fertile farms to barren waste, at two hours' notice packed in trains to Central Asia's arid plains.</p> <p><i>'Forced from our farm in Sukhumi though full of tears my eyes could see the cotton glow, a golden fleece cold in moonlight far from Greece.</i></p> <p><i>Though long ago I've not forgotten the moonglow on the Kazakh cotton when we staggered from the cattle van collectivized in Kazakhstan.'</i></p> <p>Their nightmares in the old regime have not quite dimmed the ancient dream.</p> <p>Two Soviet tubas, silver, brass, struggle through the May Day mass, tubas in whose bulled-up gleam red flags blazoned the regime, tubas in which bazookas shone reflecting coats with medals on, tubas with missiles mirrored in, now, unregimented, can begin</p>
		Archive. Song (tune: 'Red Flag')	
		Tubas	

	to learn a new tune for today and play a fanfare not for May but Maybe Day and that maybe 's the future of democracy.		the girl's first cautious tread onto the path of fallen red.
Procession up Acropolis	Two tubas join their band to blow as jaunty a new <i>Jubilo</i> as may be hazarded in days when only a muffled fanfare plays.	GIRL (song)	<i>'From Kazakhstan now back in Greece I dream the maybe, piece by piece. I dream with open eyes and see the marble of maybe... maybe.'</i>
	This band of Greeks who get called Russian with their strings, brass and percussion, whatever they could buy or borrow (and sell on their own stalls tomorrow) will play a cautious fanfare blown for democracy's foundation stone.	Wide shot, Theatre of Dionysus. Fade	The scarlet banners she trod on to find her red doll have all gone with all the instruments that played back into flea-market trade, the red flags back on pavement stalls, folded, as May Day evening falls
Fanfare to Parthenon	They'll wake what may be from the waste, this makeshift band of the displaced.  Not marble but millennia weigh on cables that maybe'll fray. Depending how you calculate democracy's foundation date is 506 or 7 or 8 but once you've got it off the ground with gleeful or more grating sound and got it hoisted in the air, it goes into which structure? Where?  With democracy the truth is this: no final fanfared edifice, only the crane however grating continually recreating...		
Girl in Theatre of Dionysus. <i>Lyra</i> player	The people's flags of deepest red spread for tender feet to tread. Those scarlet standards he saw fly above his and other heads, held high in Kazakhstan, when he was Russian, now he's Greek he watches cushion		

*The Shadow of Hiroshima* (1995) - Tony Harrison (1937)

SHADOW SAN

I heard a sound I thought was birds  
but then I swear I heard these words:

'This voice comes from the shadow cast  
by Hiroshima's A-bomb blast.  
The sound you hear inside this case  
is of a man who fans the face  
he used to have before the flash  
turned face and body into ash.  
I am the nameless fanning man  
you may address as Shadow San.

The inferno flayed me as I fanned,  
gold fan with cranes on in my hand.  
In that fierce force but one degree  
of quicker combustibility  
separated fan and me,  
but that one degree meant that the man  
was stamped on stone but not the fan.

My shadow's fading and I fear  
I may not make centenary year,  
and so before I finally fade  
give one last outing to this shade,  
and you will be my eyes to see  
this fiftieth anniversary.'

He bowed. I bowed, and then began  
one day's parole for Shadow San.

..

Radio exercises

The Shadow said, 'I recognize  
this pre-war tune for exercise.  
Not only here but through Japan  
this was how each day began  
with music from the NHK  
[our BBC] to start the day.  
This Radio Tai-chi's been broadcast  
before and since the A-bomb blast.  
Radio Tai-chi's brought the nation,  
ruined and wrecked, regeneration





of weary flesh and hopeless soul  
and got the flag back up the pole.

My shadow's eighty, so is this  
devastated edifice,  
built 1915 by a Czech  
now A-Bomb Dome, symbolic wreck  
left standing for our meditation  
on nuclear death and devastation.

Though the river by the name  
of Motoyasu's just the same  
and though the old sun emblem flies  
there's nothing else I recognize  
in all this city I called home  
but this gaunt husk, this gutted Dome  
opposite the Peace Park where  
they'll loose the doves into the air  
tomorrow at 8.2.3  
too late, alas, for me to see.  
At 8.15 the Peace Bell's chime  
means my fiftieth burning time.

KOBAISHI, SAN

•

Kobaishi San,  
Hiroshima's champion pigeon man,  
does Radio Tai-chi exercises  
beside his pigeon racing prizes  
and cooing and flapping up above's  
a loft full of symbolic doves  
his pigeons are called on to be  
tomorrow at 8.2.3.  
August 6th, 8.2.3's  
the time tomorrow that makes these  
flapping pigeons VIPs.  
Kobaishi San's cohort  
of colombophiles, apart from sport,  
every August 6th supply  
doves of peace to fill the sky  
at 8.2.3: eight minutes past

the time of Hiroshima's A-bomb blast.  
And all the homing pigeons home  
back to their lofts past A-Bomb Dome.  
He'll be there to count them back and by  
about 8.30 he can scan the sky  
and at 8.40 can begin  
to whistle his flock of pigeons in.

•

The Flame of Peace burns just behind  
the ten green cages where, confined  
until tomorrow's special day,  
the pigeon fanciers' peace doves stay,  
kept unfed, till they're set free  
tomorrow at 8.2.3,  
and, in about ten minutes, speed  
back to their lofts to get their feed.

•

SAKAMOTO SAN

And this is Sakamoto San,  
proud his birds can help Japan  
make tomorrow's plea for Peace,  
who crates a score for the Release.  
And he'll be at his loft to count,  
if twenty go, the same amount  
come home. Though the flight back's short  
peace doves can get lost, or caught.

•

Hara San paints  
the A-Bomb  
Dome

While pigeon fanciers prepare  
others start the day with prayer.  
Like Hiroshi Hara who each year  
begins his own peace ritual here.  
'Hiroshi Hara, did you say?'  
said Shadow San, 'Alive today?'  
How come a man now sixty-three  
survived the Bomb blast and not me?'

Because, by chance, he was away  
 at his grandmother's that fatal day,  
 Hara San has lived to see  
 this fiftieth anniversary.  
 Hara San, lucky to survive  
 and live to 1995,  
 is a painter and his way  
 of commemorating A-Bomb Day  
 and all his friends lost in the war  
 is on the 5th, today, to draw  
 and paint the A-Bomb Dome with water from  
 the river those flayed by the Bomb,  
 including all his friends from school,  
 jumped in, hoping it would cool  
 their burning and bomb-blackened skin,  
 here where he dips his bottle in.  
 His schoolmates' shrieks from blackened lips  
 haunt Hara San each time he dips  
 his brush in water from the stream  
 to give relief to those who scream,  
 all his dying schoolmates, those  
 whose skin slid off their flesh like clothes.  
 Like clothes, three sizes oversize  
 their flayed skin loosens from their thighs.  
 Burns and blisters, bloated blebs  
 burst as the Motoyasu ebbs,  
 the tidal Motoyasu trails  
 black flaps of flesh like chiffon veils.  
 Like kimonos with their belts untied  
 black sloughed-off skin floats on the tide.  
 This water mixed with children's cries  
 paints the Dome, green trees, blue skies  
 and in that way, he hopes, redeems  
 something from his schoolmates' screams.  
 'The force that blew the Dome apart,'  
 said the Shadow, 'makes short work of art.'

..

Baseball stadium

Close to the Dome on soil where heat  
 burnt the soles off people's feet,  
 on Saturdays, close to Ground Zero,  
 crowds cheer the current sporting hero.

Tomorrow they may pause in play  
 to watch the peace doves pass that way.

Shadow San stood, head on one side,  
 listening, and then he cried:  
 'You'd need a stadium five times higher  
 to seat all those who died by fire.  
 Where you see baseball I can hear  
 all those thousands who can't cheer.  
 Listen, can't you hear the choir  
 of those who perished in the fire?'

'I hear a baseball being hit  
 or thudding into catcher's mitt!'

Shadow San, exasperated  
 I heard no chorus of cremated,  
 deaf to all the humming dead,  
 turned to me again and said:

'Dead men's mouths make only M,  
 the M in *Dome*, the M in *Bomb*,  
 tuned to the hum that's coming from  
 the A-Bomb Dome that I hear hum  
 all round this baseball stadium,  
 still after all these fifty years  
 reverberating in my ears.  
 Can you *not* hear it? Or the choir?'

'No, only a baseball hitting wire!'

And you, in front of your TVs  
 which are, no doubt, all Japanese,  
 all you sitting there at home  
 can you hear the humming Dome,  
 the M, the M? As one of those  
 who always haunts where water flows

Shadow San, destroyed by heat,  
drew me away to this retreat.

\*

Shinto shrine      'This,' said Shadow San, 'this shrine,  
though I'm not certain, seems like mine.  
The fiery fountain dragon felt  
the same fierce force that made me melt  
and melted but can be remade  
to spout cool water in the shade.  
Burnt red banners and bamboo,  
orange arches all made new.  
That character carved on this trough  
was blackened but not blasted off.  
This lion though its jaw got cracked  
has all the rest of it intact.

I came here to this Shinto shrine  
most mornings between eight and nine,'  
the Shadow told me, 'and the day  
I was to die I came to pray,  
to pull the bell rope, throw the yen,  
bow twice, clap twice'... He broke off. Then  
Shadow San, although he fanned  
obsessively, grabbed at my hand  
and with a more than shadow squeeze  
made my blood and spirit freeze.  
SONOKO      'I see my Sonoko returning.  
It was her who I was yearning  
on the steps for, burning, burning.

Ah those tender, tender fingertips  
the memory of those lips, those lips.'  
At that moment no dead man  
can have longed for life like Shadow San,  
who, hoping love could break through time  
thought he watched his loved-one climb  
the blasted but now rebuilt shrine  
to seek the help of powers divine.

But once he'd seen her throw the yen  
hope left him when he spoke again.  
'No! No!' he said, 'Not Sonoko,  
we both died fifty years ago.  
And if she *had* survived she'd be  
a scarred and shrunken seventy-three.  
But that girl, head bowed at the shrine  
wings my heart, she's so like mine,  
so like the girl I was to meet  
that August 6th and go and eat  
*sushi* and drink *sake* and...  
the night of love we'd also planned.  
And I sat longing, planning  
on the bank steps, fanning, fanning  
in a 100 Fahrenheit  
longing for my girl and night...  
when all my flesh was set alight.'

\*

NHK and  
A-Bomb Dome

Above this shrine where he had seen  
the girl like his, the workers clean  
windows at the NHK  
(their BBC) for Peace-Dove Day  
and clean the windows so they'll see  
to film the peace-doves being set free  
or point out to visitors the view  
the Shadow keeps returning to:  
'The A-Bomb Dome I never can  
quite lose from view,' said Shadow San.  
'It's as if,' he said, 'these views were by  
my favourite painter Hokusai,  
and if he re-did his hundred views  
instead of Mount Fuji now he'd choose  
as Hara San, his painter heir  
still painting on his folding chair,  
chose, the A-Bomb Dome, the eye  
always gets recaptured by.  
I take my city bearings from  
that fellow relic of the Bomb.'

Elementary  
school

The school where all the pupils died  
stands rebuilt near this riverside.

•

When Shadow San set eyes on these  
he began to sing in Japanese:  
*'Misu, misu kudasai,*  
water, water they'd all cry  
burned and blackened, soon to die  
if these pupils here had been  
in this same room at 8.15  
the 6th of August' 45.

None of them would be alive.

And none would see another star  
if they'd been where now they are,  
and me, this shadow Rip Van Winkle  
for whom all stars have lost their twinkle,  
came here to school before the War  
and also learned to use a saw.

I hear my own voice in this choir  
I hope the world will spare from fire.  
I learned this song, it's one you sing  
to calm little pigeons panicking.'

•

MITSUFUJI SAN

The A-Bomb Dome and all the rest  
make Mitsufuji San depressed.  
He wouldn't mind if it was made  
into a vast pinball arcade,  
a game that millions will play  
even tomorrow, A-Bomb Day.  
He's never been to see you yet,  
I told the sullen silhouette.  
He thinks it's better to forget.

He likes to sing, to play, to laugh,  
never goes near the Cenotaph,  
unless, like now, delivering doves.

He only does the things he loves,  
what makes him happy, and doves do.  
He sings to them to make them coo;  
his girlfriend does, and he'd prefer  
to sing this little song to her,  
a pigeon song he'd sooner use to  
calm her flutters into coos.  
Shadow San who said he'd seen  
birds in flames at 8.15  
with a dead man's dosed mouth M  
hummed the pigeon song with him,  
then said quietly, 'Which burns quicker,  
birds or basket, wings or wicker?'

Tram crosses the  
Aioi Bridge

As the sun-drenched streetcar crossed  
the centre of the Holocaust,  
the Aioi Bridge the Enola Gay  
took focus from that fatal day,  
I heard the fanning Shadow say:  
'The trams of Hiroshima ran  
always on time,' said Shadow San,  
'but at 8.15 were blasted black  
along this then bomb-buckled track  
and all the passengers, like me,  
were fanned into eternity.'

Mitsufuji San  
phones Sonoko

The Shadow melted into shade.  
I thought the phone made him afraid,  
I thought the booth put him in mind  
of that place he'd been confined  
until this morning in and must return  
when the Peace Bell chimes to burn  
and to resume at 8.15  
his most uncarnal quarantine.  
Though Mitsufuji hates to dwell  
on why and how the A-bomb fell  
the Dome's dark hellish silhouette  
summons up his dove, his pet.  
The fanning shade stood flabbergasted  
that the Dome the Bomb had blasted

	<p>could now so magically summon, from waste and wilderness, a woman.</p> <p>I asked the Shadow to translate: 'The A-Bomb Dome makes him a date but he's got some hours to wait. He'll leave his peace-doves first and then go to play pin-ball until ten.'</p>		<p>The sun tomorrow that's forecast as hot as when the A-bomb blast exploded fifty years ago will make the fans flap to and fro and sell a fortune in iced drinks but now, turns fiery red, and sinks.</p>
Hara San paints the A-Bomb Dome	<p>Hara San hears scorched throats croak where now new thirsts get quenched by Coke. 'And Coke,' sighed fanning Shadow San, 'has come to conquer new Japan.'</p> <p>The forecast from the NHK predicts another scorching day tomorrow and the shops will sell scores of ice-cold crimson cans of Coke, and scores and scores of fans to cool the watchers waiting for the liberated doves to soar.</p> <p>Tomorrow morning, 8.15, he'll give the trees their August green and the sky its final blue, then what Hara San will do at the very moment the Bomb fell and he hears the tolling of the bell is seal and sign it with the date... 'The date that also sealed my fate,' added the watching Shadow San who, as the day cooled, dosed his fan.</p>	Hiroshima by night, neon lights	<p>Except when nightworld neon threw his outline out in red or blue, or he made another bitter joke about the crimson conqueror, Coke, he stayed unseen and silent in the night until he stopped me at this sight: 'Parlor Atom, look this sign must mean another A-bomb shrine. with shadows in it just like mine. Perhaps I'll find a fellow shade.'</p> <p>'It's a mere pinball machine arcade I'm sorry to tell you, Shadow San, there are thousands like it in Japan there are 30 million Japanese spend their nights in "shrines" like these.'</p> <p>'I thought Mitsufuji came to pray!' 'No, Shadow San, to play, to play A pinball addict I'm afraid.'</p> <p>We watched him enter the arcade. The sound unleashed made Shadow shrink. He shouted out: 'It makes me think of Hiroshima shattering, and me a shadow showered with bomb debris.'</p>
Sunset	<p>The setting sun forecast as stronger tomorrow made my shadow longer, but Shadow San's stayed just the same as when first cast by flash and flame.</p>	Parlour Atom pinball arcade	<p>Shadow San drew me ahead half-excited, half in dread, and when Mitsufuji came he said:</p>
		Mitsufuji San meets Sonoko	

Mitsufuji San  
and Sonoko in  
Love Hotel

'Mitsufuji's little dove  
's so like my own cremated love,  
and maybe all my dead man's yearning, still  
undiminished from the burning  
has made Mitsufuji San,  
the Hiroshima pigeon man,  
and the *sake* girl he's met unite  
to commemorate my final night.'

The thought consoled him for a while.  
But Shadow San soon lost the smile  
I'd imagined that he'd had  
and stopped me in the night to add:

'Like men condemned to hang or fry  
get favourite meals before they die,  
the man who fanned his way to hell  
wills them to the Love Hotel.'

..

'Seeing Sonoko asleep  
could even make a shadow weep.  
Girls as beautiful, as young, as sweet  
were seared to cinders by the heat.

Sayonara, Sonoko,  
I love you but I have to go  
back to my museum case  
with no body and no face,  
back to a world where none embrace  
nor do the things I did before  
our hawks and jingos joined the war,  
and you're so lucky to do after –  
drinking *sake*, singing, laughter,  
even Parlor Atom, but above  
everything on earth, to love.

Sayonara, I must return  
back to the bank steps where I'll bum.  
tomorrow morning, 8.15,  
only this flimsy paper screen,

Shadow San  
departs

Radio exercises.  
Mitsufuji San  
wakes in Love  
Hotel

Peace ceremony  
begins

flammable as a fan, 's between  
your sleeping body and the man  
who'll be cremated, Shadow San.  
When you hear the Peace Bell chime  
that's 8.15, my burning time.  
First the conflagration of the fan  
then after it the fanning man.

Before my eyes burst from the heat  
a blazing dove falls at my feet.'

I saw the saddened shade retire  
to face again the flash and fire.

Mitsufuji San's alarm  
that his doves may come to harm  
makes him run past A-Bomb Dome  
to catch a tram to take him home  
across the bridge they call Aioi,  
the bomb-aimer of 'Little Boy'  
high up in the Enola Gay  
fifty years ago today  
took focus from where now we see,  
walking the upright of the T,  
two survivors' shadows but  
shadows still fixed foot to foot,  
two survivors here to find  
the special seats they've been assigned  
to hear the speeches, pray, and see  
precisely at 8.23  
all the doves in the release  
making their winged plea for peace.

The cicadas' dry tattoo  
gets quicker towards 8.22.  
Fans, like a chorus of quick sighs,  
will the doves into the skies.  
A white glove poised against the blue

	<p>signals it's 8.2.2.,  only one minute now before  the liberated doves will soar  above the fans and the cicadas -  Sakamoto San's, Okada's,  and champion Kobaishi San's  and carefree Mitsufuji San's,  flying above the sighing fans.</p> <p>Once the signaller's white glove  gives the signal, every dove  will rise and fly as cage-doors fall,  crash to the ground, and free them all.</p> <p>And fanciers wait at home to greet  their hungry peace-doves home to eat.  Normally each fancier's flock  's back and fed by nine o'clock.</p>		<p>the old Japan that took Nanking  under its dark, blood-spattered wing,  Japan in her aggressive guise  taking Pearl Harbor by surprise,  the prison camps that made us pray  for any means to bring VJ.</p> <p>Many doves freed on this day  fall victims to these birds of prey  and Mitsufuji fears his may.  A dove he sang to might this minute  have a hawk's beak thrusting in it.</p> <p>Or, turned scavenger, join other strays  from all the former Peace Dove Days,  from '94, 3, 2, 1.  The Peace Park's almost overrun  and the symbol of man's peace-seeking soul  is a matter for city pest control.</p> <p>And peace doves of the recent past  could end up sterilized, or gassed.</p> <p>Those symbolic doves that flew  in '91 or '92  in '93 or 4 survive  by fighting these from '95...</p> <p>Pigeon/Peace-doves brawl and fight.  Is the world at peace tonight?</p> <p>Or are we all like Shadow San  facing inferno with a fan?</p>
Release of doves, 8.23	•		
Last dove	<p>The peace-doves have been freed but why  won't this last shaking straggler fly?  Perhaps he's seen what's in the sky.</p>		
Hawks	<p>Where peace-doves are the birds of prey  are never very far away.  These hawks cruising the skies  don't care what peace-doves symbolize.  These emblems are mere morsels, meat,  their ripped-out innards good to eat.  Since yesterday the hawks have waited  to see their lunches liberated.  Hiroshima hawks are glad to glut  and gorge themselves on peace-dove gut.</p> <p>It's not inappropriate birds of prey  are also present on Peace Day.  They could well stand for Japanese  who forced other Asians to their knees.  They stand for a spirit from the past  that moved Japan before the blast,</p>	<p>Mitsufuji San  back at pigeon  loft</p> <p>A-Bomb Dome  and pigeons</p> <p>Fan</p>	





## Don't Call Us

Adrian Mitchell (1932-2008) - *Blue Coffee: Poems 1985-1996* (1996)

- 1 Stalin phoned Pasternak's
- 2 Noisy flat.
- 3 'Hello, Boris.'
- 4 'Er---hello---can we chat?'
  
- 5 'What about?' asked Stalin.
- 6 The poet said:
- 7 'Life and death.'
- 8 The phone went dead.

## THE HARP

Kenneth C. Steven (1968) - *The Missing Days* (1995)

Under the burning crumble of the peat  
Last spring, they found the harp.  
A thousand years and more it lay  
Unsung, the chords taut in buried hands  
Of Celtic bards. The music curled asleep,  
Its strings still resin, left full of woods  
And sea and birds, like paintings in the earth,  
And only curlews mourning in a bleary sky above.

They lifted out the harp, a dozen heads  
All bent and captured, listening for the sounds  
That might lie mute inside - the bones of hands,  
That once had strummed for kings. But all around  
Were broken promises, the wreckage of the Viking lash  
Across their history's face. The harp still played-  
Remembered how to weep.

## THE HARP

Andrew Crozier (1943-2008) - *All Where Each Is* (1985)

1 An open book: work. *This metre*  
2 *which in England outlived the Anglo-*  
3 *Saxon language several centuries.*  
4 These are only years. The tree is growing  
5 it renews its leaves, they fall.  
6 A thought transcribed over a century  
7 is ink still damp upon the paper.  
8 Wind moves in the leaves, rain gleams  
9 upon them. It makes them make a  
10 sound like rain drops falling, they move  
11 against each other. Wind and rain  
12 in silence touching sounds out of the earth.

## Art History

Dick Davis (1945) – *Touchwood* (1996)

Paintings and poems - what survives,  
The residue of used-up lives  
That want to live a little more.  
Their gaze pursues you to the door.

Your life's an orphanage in which  
The foundling poor stare at the rich  
Who load their arms with children they  
Hug briefly - but then walk away.

## The War in the Congo

Douglas Dunn (1942) - *Northlight* (1988)

- 1 A man in a bar in Glasgow told me of how
- 2 He'd served with the Irish Army in the Congo
- 3 Under the flag of the United Nations.
- 4 'It was hot,' he told me, 'hot, and equatorial.'
- 5 They passed through a deserted and dog-ridden town.
- 6 They passed a house that had been blown up.
- 7 An arm, with a hand, rose between blasted breeze-blocks.
- 8 In the black hand was an envelope, between fingers and thumb.
- 9 The Irish soldier looked at the hand and its letter.
- 10 Cement dust scabbed the blood on the arm.
- 11 He tore a corner off the envelope, removing the stamp,
- 12 Which he sent to his nephew in Howth, in Ireland.
- 13 In reply to what my companion asked him,
- 14 The soldier said it wasn't right to read a stranger's mail.
- 15 There was no one about in the little town, other than
- 16 Dogs and birds, and the arm and its hand, like a cleft stick.
- 17 He didn't say if it was the hand of a man or a woman
- 18 In which the letter was held, between fingers and thumb.
- 19 It was the arm of black Anon, of Africa,
- 20 Holding a letter, just received or unsent.
- 21 What concerns me is the soldier's nephew in Howth
- 22 Holding the piece of envelope with tweezers
- 23 Over the spout of a steaming kettle, and the stamp,
- 24 Renewed and drying between sheets of blotting-paper.
- 25 Philately of foreign wars is a boy in Howth
- 26 Licking a transparent hinge, and mounting a stamp
- 27 In his album, hot, hot and equatorial,
- 28 That innocent know-nothing stamp, lonesome in history.
- 29 Did he or she read it, that letter? Who wrote it? Who sent it?

30 So many stamps, and stamps from many countries,  
31 And boys saying to their uncles and elder brothers,  
32 'Remember, when you get there, to send me their stamps.'

## The Field Transmitter

Peter Scupham (1933) - *The Air Show* (1988)

1 The Field Transmitter, heavy in its box,  
2 Uncurls its oily braids and hanks of wire,  
3 Stuck by a green corrosion to brass terminals.  
4 The knurled knob taps and stutters dit and dah,  
5 Its V for Victory: 'For you, the war is over.  
6 Come in, my children, from the echoing green,  
7 The city street as yet unlicked by paint;  
8 Climb from the bunkers in your sad back-gardens,  
9 Yesterday's foxholes: iron, sacking, iron.  
10 Hand in your outsize helmets, bits of perspex,  
11 Your bomb-fins and that treasured German arm-band;  
12 Dismiss those leaden armies to the dust  
13 Which settles into what you will call memory.  
14 Crouched for the last time on the garage floor,  
15 Let my headset's hard constriction tighten  
16 Till all your war becomes a new, strange tinnitus,  
17 The bombers climbing through your cloudy brain-cells,  
18 Gaining their altitude and levelling off  
19 In as much sky as spreads from ear to ear.  
20 This band of gunfire bouncing off your skull  
21 Makes the thick sound of other children dying,  
22 Out of your reach, beyond your messages,  
23 Who played their war-games, heard the sirens glow  
24 Hot silver filaments in miles of night,  
25 Till gathering babel took them to its arms  
26 And held them still, and held them very still.'



## History of the Tin Tent

Tom Paulin (1949) - *Walking a Line* (1994)

- 1 During the first push on the Somme
- 2 a temporary captain
- 3 in the Royal Engineers
- 4 ---Peter Nissen a Canadian
- 5 designed an experimental
- 6 steel tent
- 7 that could be erected
- 8 from stacked materials
- 9 by an NCO and eight men
- 10 in 110 minutes
- 11 so the Nissen hut is the descendant
- 12 and enriched relation
- 13 of the Elephant and other
- 14 similar steel structures
- 15 that were adopted then adapted
- 16 for trench warfare
- 17 sheets of corrugated iron
- 18 beaverjoints purlins joists
- 19 wire nails and matchboard lining
- 20 were packed into kits
- 21 so complete societies
- 22 could be knocked and bent
- 23 into sudden being
- 24 by a squad of soldiers with a truck
- 25 a few tools
- 26 and a pair of ladders
- 27 barracks hospital
- 28 mess hall and hangar
- 29 ---chapel shooting-range petrol dump &c
- 30 they were all bowed into shape
- 31 from rippling thundery
- 32 hundredweight acres
- 33 of sheet metal

34 Europe became a desert  
35 so these tents could happen  
36 though they now seem banal  
37 like the word *forever*

38 all over England  
39 on farmland and airfields  
40 these halfsubmerged sheds  
41 have a throwaway permanence  
42 a never newpainted  
43 sense of duration  
44 that exists anywhere  
45 and belongs nowhere  
46 ---ribbed basic  
47 set fast in pocked concrete  
48 they're almost like texts  
49 no one wants to read  
50 ---texts prefabs caves  
51 a whole aesthetic in reverse

News Report, September 1991.  
U.S. BURIED IRAQI SOLDIERS ALIVE IN GULF WAR

Denise Levertov (1923-1997) - *Evening Train* (1992)

1 " *What you saw was a*  
2 *bunch of trenches with*  
3 *arms sticking out.*"  
4 "Plows mounted on  
5 tanks. Combat  
6 earthmovers."  
7 "Defiant."  
8 "Buried."  
9 "Carefully planned and  
10 rehearsed."  
11 " *When we*  
12 *went through there wasn't*  
13 *anybody left.*"  
14 "Awarded  
15 Silver Star."  
16 "Reporters  
17 banned."  
18 "Not a single  
19 American killed."  
20 "Bodycount  
21 impossible."  
22 " *For all I know ,*  
23 *thousands , said*  
24 *Colonel Moreno.*"  
25 " *What you*  
26 *saw was a bunch of*  
27 *buried trenches*  
28 *with people's*  
29 *arms and things*  
30 *sticking out.*"  
31 "Secretary Cheney  
32 made no mention."  
33 "Every single American  
34 was inside

35 the juggernaut  
36 impervious  
37 to small-arms  
38 fire." " *I know*  
39 *burying people*  
40 *like that sounds*  
41 *pretty nasty* , said  
42 Colonel Maggart,  
43 *But...."*  
44 "His force buried  
45 about six hundred  
46 and fifty  
47 in a thinner line  
48 of trenches."  
49 " *People's arm*  
50 *sticking out."*  
51 "Every American  
52 inside."  
53 "The juggernaut."  
54 " *I'm not*  
55 *going to sacrifice*  
56 *the lives*  
57 *of my soldiers* ,  
58 Moreno said, *it's not*  
59 *cost-effective."*  
60 " *The tactic was designed*  
61 *to terrorize* ,  
62 Lieutenant Colonel Hawkins  
63 said, who helped  
64 devise it."  
65 "Schwartzkopf's staff  
66 privately  
67 estimated fifty to seventy  
68 thousand killed  
69 in the trenches."  
70 "Private Joe Queen was  
71 awarded  
72 a Bronze Star for burying  
73 trenches with his  
74 earthmover."

75 "Inside  
76 the juggernaut."  
77 "Impervious."  
78 " *A lot of the guys*  
79 *were scared* , he said,  
80 *but I*  
81 *enjoyed it ."*  
82 " *A bunch of*  
83 *trenches. People's*  
84 *arms and things*  
85 *sticking out ."*  
86 " *Cost-effective ."*

## War in the Gulf

Gillian Ferguson (1965) - *Air for Sleeping Fish* (1997)

Human sounds in trees'  
bending spines;  
fingered branches claw  
night's black fabric  
tented over earth,  
to lay bare  
a bone-coloured moon.

Widows dig  
for memories –  
compare the war  
that spawned film,  
to one swallowing it live.

There is no right  
or wrong any more –  
only people,  
plumbed with blood, .  
cocooned in whole skins,  
fearing sleep  
in treeless sands.

Falklands, 1982

P. J. Kavanagh (1931) - *An Enchantment* (1991)

There are houses today that men have walked away from  
They will never walk towards again.

*Chink!* goes a widowed chaffinch on the terrace,  
Like a hammer on concrete it hurts a nerve in the brain  
Damaged so often we quit the sun and the room.

It stands on a twig to see better, calls on and on,  
Its twinned to- and fro-ing cut short, is incredulous.  
(Back with his kitbag, kids jumping up at the gate?  
No. *Chink!*) With June half-achieved and eggs in place-  
*Chink!* - is the sound itself of loss,  
Not grief, but a clamour for all to go on as before,  
Insistent faith, misplaced, and the cat  
Asleep in blue shadow not even twitches an ear.

The Falklands, 1982

Gavin Ewart (1916-1995) - *The Young Pobble's Guide to His Toes* (1985)

1 This must have been more like the Boer War  
2 than anything seen in our lifetime,  
3 with the troopships and the cheering,  
4 the happy homecoming, the sweetheart-and-wifetime,  
5 everything looking over and solved,  
6 and no civilians involved---  
  
7 except a few stewardesses, Chinese in the galleys  
8 almost by accident taken  
9 willy-nilly on The Great Adventure,  
10 where the Argentine fusing of the shells was often  
11 mistaken---  
12 lucky for each floating sitting duck.  
13 Oh yes, we had luck!  
  
14 Luck that the slaughtered World War I soldiers  
15 who died on the Somme and at Arras  
16 would have welcomed, in their dismal trenches---  
17 though that's not to belittle the victory of the Paras,  
18 who lost, all in all, very few dead,  
19 good men, well led.  
  
20 At home, indeed, it was terribly like the World Cup,  
21 though far less bright, commentated, stagey,  
22 security making the war news nil, mostly,  
23 but good value when they finally stopped being  
24 cagey.  
25 Was the *General Belgrano* really offside?  
26 A few hundred died.  
  
27 And the outstanding achievements of the great Press,  
28 particularly that section called 'yellow',  
29 that wrote 'Up yours!' on missiles, went berserk  
30 and shouted 'GOTCHA!' in a giant coward's bellow---  
31 and circulation rises, like *The Sun*.



32 But was it well done?

33 Kipling's 'Recessional' told us to beware of Hubris,  
34 and not give way to flag-waving  
35 (they don't in the Lebanon, or Northern Ireland)---  
36 if men's lives are worth giving, they're also worth  
37 saving.  
38 Who let them start the bloody thing?  
39 That's the question, there's the sting.

## Flight

Dick Davis (1945) – *Touchwood* (1996)

*After the Arab defeat of the Persians in the seventh century AD some aristocrats of the defeated Sasanian dynasty fled to China. Gravestones indicate that they hung on there as a distinct community for at least two centuries.*

In time the temporary withdrawal  
Became a way of life. How long  
Before they could admit there'd be  
No going back, before they ceased  
To live off rumours of a prince,  
A scion of the royal house  
In hiding, living hand to mouth,  
About to gather troops to hurl  
The haughty enemy back from  
The gates of Ctesiphon -  
which was  
A pilfered ruin, a harmless tourists'  
Curiosity somewhere beyond  
The brave new city of Baghdad?

So they erect the stone inscribed  
With words that speak to home though home  
Has long since ceased to speak such words,  
A witness to a way of life  
Corroded by fidelity  
That is a kind of willing madness;  
A story told and then retold,  
Whose referents are all elsewhere,  
And now lives only in these minds  
That still repeat the litany  
Of what was lost, till they too die.

Brut

*(after Sir Frederic Madden's Poetical Semi-saxon Paraphrase  
of the Cottonion and related British Museum manuscripts)*

Ian Duhig (1954) - *The Mersey Goldfish* (1995)

For horned Menelaus  
the Greeks took Old Troy,  
salted its vineyards,  
slaughtered its folk,  
poor innocent bastards  
reduced all to words,  
a right bloody stroke  
from his friends and relations,  
their oars in for Helen -  
o praise for her boat-race  
surpasses my art,  
but you'd fork out a fiver  
just to hear the girl fart.  
So when the old king  
tired of twanging his string  
he called in all favours,  
suggested a raid  
to make them all famous:  
Siege of the Decade!  
The price on the meter?  
Think of a number,  
say: all those you've met.  
Think of them dead.  
You've got the picture.  
Troy got the point.  
Some people blame her  
who never raised sword,  
others the dick-thing  
Men get about war.  
And that woody horse?  
Boxed half a batalion?  
Some sex-toy it was,  
no I-talian stallion.  
In Greek propaganda  
Old Trojans believe  
the slaver Cassandra  
serves from tea leaves,  
but she thought the beast  
was breed of the breed of

Catherine the Great's  
traction contraption,  
who felt the best Ovid  
translates best to action.

## Just Where to Draw the Line

Roy Fisher (1930) - *Birmingham River* (1994)

1 A comment on Saul Bellow: 'It's marvellous---  
2 I mean, just the little incidental descriptions  
3 are better than most poetry. And they  
4 just keep coming.'

5 ---those Quattrocento paintings  
6 with a tiny peacable city  
7 on every hilltop in the distance  
8 bobbing on the skyline in a rich  
9 luminous watery twilight. While  
10 near at hand huge imaginary personages  
11 slug out needless religious nastiness  
12 and mess up the view.

Christmas 1989

Andrew Waterman - *In the Planetarium* (1990)

Last month's miracle was young people dancing  
on top of the wall dividing a city, hands  
from the West reaching for those from the East  
until that day shot for such transgression.

"The Berlin Wall is History!" headlines proclaim-  
meaning not just dead, but irrelevant. Likewise  
my postwar German friends say: "Hitler? -  
that Nazi stuff's just history..."

But history never dies, is the perilous tide  
that wave upon wave breaking bubbles carries us onward,  
floats once again like broken-up jigsaw  
Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia.

In the baroque basilica of St Kasimir,  
Vilnius, history laughs, is a headscarved  
woman clearing out the Museum of Atheism:  
"All junk now, the lot wouldn't fetch three kopecks!"

While if, in Romania, this day a tyrant is killed,  
history weeps through the imperfect living who bury  
his victims; melts down their myriad candles...  
And also history stares betrayed

from sad eyes knowing Utopia too has died,  
the lethal old charmer who led us on, alchemised  
the selfless to murderers and their prey. Leaving  
the future to crave merely more cars and shopping.



Filmclip: Leningrad, October 1935

Ken Smith (1938- 2003) - *Tender to the Queen of Spain* (1993)

Dark comes early, and wet snow.  
The citizens hurry from work,  
Scarfed, buttoned, thinking of supper,  
the tram clanking and squealing  
in whose glass an arm has wiped  
a V of lit space wherein smoke,  
old and young wrapped for winter,  
eyes focussed somewhere ahead,  
dreaming perhaps of a sausage,  
of bread, coffee, a warm bed,  
a bullet in the back of the brain.  
Then they're gone. Next comes  
the future. **It** looks like the past.



A CZECH EDUCATION (1948-)  
Jamie McKendrick (1955) - *The Sirocco Room* (1991)

*for Lucie*

*'All that remains of Clementis is the cap on Gottwald's head.'*

*---Milan Kundera*

- 1 A frontispiece for one of the standard school texts
- 2 showed Gottwald donning a Russian cap Clementis,
- 3 the Jewish partisan, has handed him
- 4 in a sweeping gesture---reminiscent of Raleigh
- 5 or Garibaldi before Victor Emmanuel---
- 6 a history teacher's favourite anecdote.
  
- 7 When Clementis had been hung for treason
- 8 at the front of the new edition was Gottwald
- 9 in the same photograph and hat, but his righthand man
- 10 has done the bunk. Call it ingratitude
- 11 or history's trick photography
- 12 the hat he wore no longer had a story.
  
- 13 When not long after Stalin's funeral
- 14 Herr Gottwald died still dogging his master's heels
- 15 they built a gimcrack shrine up Zizkov Hill
- 16 near the heart of old Prague
- 17 to house his glorious memory and corpse.
- 18 In life a puppet, in death a waxwork doll.
  
- 19 He was embalmed after the fashion of Lenin, or almost;
- 20 only the State's unpractised taxidermists
- 21 lacked the Kremlin's expertise with death.
- 22 Either that, or there was a Joker in the pack.
- 23 As Gottwald began to rot, less and less
- 24 of the man seemed to be on display.
  
- 25 More and more people heard and a series

26 of regrettable jokes corrupted the young.  
27 Filing past the much-revered carcass  
28 these jokes, like luxuries smuggled across  
29 a guarded border, simultaneously overwhelmed  
30 two girls on a school outing in '58.

31 The pious hush in there had been too much for them.  
32 Frogmarched out, shaking all too audibly  
33 they were disciplined next day for their calculated  
34 insult to the People, their act of vandalism.  
35 Gottwald then fell out of favour.  
36 After '68 his punctured image was reinflated

37 to its former eminence in all the history books.  
38 (That bubbling noise again: '*Bobok! Bobok!*' )  
39 His poor bruised rancid body wheeled  
40 up and down and in and out of state  
41 as if damned to perpetual motion---decay  
42 always advancing on cosmetics.

43 And those beleaguered trimming textbook hacks  
44 dodging, veering and double-backing  
45 to readjust the nation's history syllabus  
46 can best be seen as hapless coffin-bearers  
47 stumbling up a downward escalator  
48 as one more blemished limb breaks out of cover.

*A History of Soviet Organ Music*

John Ash (1948) - *The Burnt Pages* (1991)

The boy is in the field,  
and the new tractor is there, gleaming.  
Tears spring to his eyes. An organ sounds,  
and this causes some uncertainty  
in the audience, since the very existence  
of Soviet organ music had been something  
entirely unsuspected until this moment.  
And the boy is a marionette,  
and the tractor only a careful construction  
of blue cornflowers and straw, even though  
the corn continues golden for miles over the black earth,  
as far as Kazan or vanished Itil of the Khazars!

The history of Soviet organ music  
is easily told: from the time of its foundation  
in the tenth century, the Russian church  
has found no use for the organ whatsoever.  
Thus the Soviet organ is a youthful organ  
heard to best advantage in lively medleys  
of traditional Uzbek melodies-  
and, oh, how blue the cornflowers, how black  
the earth, how red the kerchief of the female comrade!  
The younger brother of the heroic youth, meanwhile,  
is having a fit of hysterics on the Ferris wheel  
which turns and turns to the accompaniment  
of Soviet organ music.

Toni Harrison (1937) - *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992)

Exactly a hundred years ago in 1892 the marble statue of a dissident German Jewish poet, rejected by his fatherland, was taken by Elizabeth, Empress of Austria, to a retreat in Corfu. The film-poem follows its fortunes through the century from its eviction from the island by the German Kaiser, who bought the palace after the Empress was assassinated in 1899, to its present resting place at Toulon in France.

Once established in Corfu, the Kaiser claimed that while Europe was preparing for war he was excavating the fifth century B C pediment which featured a giant Gorgon. The film-poem takes this terrifying creature of legend who turns men to stone as a metaphor for what the Kaiser unearthed on to our century, and finds her long shadow still cast across its closing years.

Clutched in the left hand of the marble Heinrich Heine the Kaiser evicted from Corfu is the manuscript of '*Was will die einsame Träne*', a *lied* set to music by Schumann. The song in various transformations makes the same journey as its hounded author.

To the same degree, though in different fashion,  
those who use force and those who endure it are  
turned to stone.

Simone Weil: *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*

Art forces us to gaze into the horror of existence,  
yet without being turned to stone by the vision.

Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy*

Ask General Schwarzkopf who Goethe and Schiller  
and Heine were. He would be well advised to  
answer if he wants to go on addressing Chambers of  
Commerce at \$50,000 a pop. 'Were they the  
outfield of the St Louis Cardinals in 1939?'

Kurt Vonnegut

Gulf: Tank  
Gorgon / Golden  
Sea

From long ago the Gorgon's gaze  
stares through time into our days.  
Under seas, as slow as oil  
the Gorgon's snaky tresses coil.  
The Gorgon under the golden tide  
brings ghettos, gulags, genocide.

ECU-Land  
(Frankfurt)

That's maybe the reason why so  
many mirrors reach so high into  
the modern Frankfurt sky.

ECU-land seems to prepare  
to neutralize the Gorgon's stare.  
But what polished shields can neutralize  
those ancient petrifying eyes?

Goethe statue,  
Frankfurt

Great German soul, most famed Frankfurter  
on his plinth, the poet Goethe.  
Born Frankfurt but deceased Weimar  
where his mortal remnants are.  
The old Cold War used to divide  
where he was born from where he died  
but now they're once more unified.

Schiller statue

And once more it doesn't seem so far  
from Frankfurt-am-Main back to Weimar.  
And but an amble down an avenue  
to Friedrich Schiller on full view  
and I suppose I ought to say  
it's right they're put on proud display  
(though often scorned although their scale  
's, say fifty times this can of ale).  
It's proper that the Fatherland  
should give them monuments so grand  
but there's another German who  
is quite the equal of those two  
(and greater in some people's eyes!),  
whose monument's a fifth their size.

HEINRICH  
HEINE memorial

There are, I think, three reasons why  
my statue's not so bloody high:

1: I was subversive; 2:  
 (what's worse to some) I was a Jew  
 and 3: I'm back here almost hidden  
 because I was ten years bed-ridden  
 with syphilis; this keep-fit freak  
 scarcely suits my wrecked physique.  
 This monument that's far more humble  
 's to the voice you're hearing grumble  
 that he's less on public view,  
 Heinrich Heine, poet and Jew.

Two grander monuments were planned  
 but turned down by the Fatherland,  
 though to the horror of the Habsburg court,  
 both had the Empress's support,  
 Elizabeth of Austria, Sissy, who  
 felt inspired by the soulful Jew  
 (but to be frank I wouldn't quote  
 the poems she claimed my spirit wrote!).  
 In 1892.

Sissy took me to Corfu,  
 and statues Germany rejected  
 found safer spots to be erected  
 and with a more appealing view  
 of sea and cypress in Corfu  
 and, like many another hounded Jew,  
 the second statue found its way  
 to safe haven in the USA.

Your average Frankfurt-am-Mainer  
 doesn't give a shit for Heine  
 (nor, come to that, the young mainliner!).  
 So elbowed to one side back here,  
 surrounded by junked junkies' gear,  
 I, Heinrich Heine, have to gaze  
 on junkies winding tourniquets  
 made from the belt out of their jeans,  
 some scarcely older than their teens.  
 The Gorgon has them closely scanned  
 these new lost souls of ECU-land.

Schumann *lied*  
 (soprano)

The Gorgon's glance gives them their high  
 then, trapped in her gaze, they petrify.

*Ach, meine Liebe selber  
 Zerfloß wie eitel Hauch!  
 Du alte, einsame Träne,  
 Zerfließe jetzunder auch!*

Schumann set those words I wrote  
 that might bring lumps into your throat  
 (unless you grabbed for the remote!).  
 And even if you turned away  
 you could still hear the *lieder* play.  
 The marble Heine Deutschland banned  
 had this *lieder* in his hand,  
 a manuscript whose crumpled folds  
 a war-cracked index finger holds.  
 Where the statue goes the song goes too.  
 I took it with me to Corfu.  
 And wish to God I was still there  
 not here with bloodstains in my hair.  
 Europe's reluctant to shampoo  
 the gore-caked coiffure of the Jew,  
 the blood gushed from a botched injection,  
 in case it gives it some infection,  
 or maybe Europe doesn't care  
 there's junkies' blood in Heine's hair.

The gaze of modern Frankfurt's glued  
 to this glassy-eyed high altitude.  
 The Europe of the soaring cranes  
 has not seen fit to cleanse these stains  
 or give new hope to the stainer.

(soprano)

*Was will die einsame Träne?*

What is the music that redeems  
 desperate kids in such extremes?  
 Do those I hope you're watching need a  
 Schumann setting of my *lieder*?  
 'This lonely tear what doth it mean?'  
 we might well ask in such a scene.

Gaze and create. If art can't cope  
it's just another form of dope,  
and leaves the Gorgon in control  
of all the freedoms of the soul.

[I can do nothing, even cry.  
Tears are for the living eye.  
So weep, you still alive to shed  
the tears I can't shed, being dead.  
And if I could I'd shed my tears  
that in the century's dosing years  
the nations' greatest souls preside  
over such spirit-suicide,  
and that in 1992-  
Schiller, Goethe, Heine view  
the new banks rising by the hour  
above a park where chestnuts flower  
whose canopies you'd think might cover  
lunch-time lounge, reader, lover,  
but for one who wrestles on his own  
against the Gorgon who turns men to stone  
the tree with white May blossom sways  
like snakes that fringe the Gorgon's gaze,  
the serpents that surround her stare.  
Spring blossom hisses like her hair,  
as this young junkie tries to choose  
which vein today is best to use.]

Frankfurt police

The junkies' early evening high  
is cut short by the *Polizei*,  
who read the law they half-enforce,  
and let some shoot-ups take their course.

The regular police routine  
is shift the junkies in between  
Schiller and Goethe every day  
and pass by Heine on the way.

From Schiller's statue back to Goethe's  
watching smartly dressed Frankfurters  
enter the theatre, and dogs divide  
the opiate from the Opera side.

The horns tune up, the dogs bark '*raus*'  
the precincts of the opera house,  
the maestro's rapturous ovations  
kept safe by *Polizei* alsatians.  
They glimpse a shoot-up then they go  
for their own fix of *Figaro*,  
see heroin addicts then go in  
to hear heroes sing in *Lohengrin*,  
and evening junkies grouped round Goethe  
hear distorted *Zauberflöte*.

Music is so civilizing  
for the place with new banks rising:  
The main financial centre  
of the EEC has to present a  
fine *Turandot*, *Bohème*, *Così*,  
for the European VIP.  
*Traviata*, *Faust*, *Aida*,  
even Schumann's setting of my *lieder*,  
just to show, although it's mine,  
I can put my own work on the line  
and ask as the opera's about to start  
what are we doing with our art?

Are we still strumming the right lyre  
to play us through the century's fire?

['Bankfurt' they call it; by the way,  
I was a banker in my day  
and had a somewhat brief career  
as Harry Heine banker here,  
but the banks have grown and rather dwarf  
the Jewish poet from Dusseldorf,  
Not only me. Banks in the skies  
cut even Goethe down to size.]

With clouds of coins, cash cumuli  
floating in the foyer sky  
gliding guilder, hard ECU  
dream clouds of 1992,  
you'd think this Opera House foyer's  
a long way from the Gorgon's gaze.  
Escape, they're thinking, but alas  
that's the Gorgon in the glass.

The ECU bank-erecting crane  
reflected in van windowpane,  
where, afraid of Aids, the youngsters queue  
to trade old needles in for new,  
though higher and higher into the blue  
new banks to house the hard ECU  
rise into the Frankfurt skies,  
piece by piece, like Gorgon's eyes  
or polished shield of one who slays  
the Gorgon, but can't kill her gaze.

Schumann *lied*  
(soprano)

*Was will die einsame Träne?  
Sie trübt mir ja den Blick.  
Sie blieb aus alten Zeiten  
In meinem Auge zurück.*

*Sie hatte viel leuchtende Schwestern,  
Die alle zerfloßen sind.  
Mit meinen Qualen und Freuden,  
Zerfloßen in Nacht und Wind.*

*Wie Nebel sind auch zerflossen  
Die blauen Sternelein,  
Die mir jene Freuden und Qualen  
Gelächelt ins Herz hinein.*

*Ach, meine Liebe selber  
Zerfloß wie eitel Hauch!  
Du alte, einsame Träne,  
Zerfließe jetzunder auch!*

Corfu shrine of  
HEINRICH  
HEINE

Isn't this a somewhat finer  
monument to Heinrich Heine?  
Banished from the Fatherland  
with pen and *lieder* in my hand.  
The *lieder* Schumann makes so touching  
is in this manuscript I'm clutching,  
and though war breaks round the manuscript  
my hand will always keep it gripped.  
But I'll have ten years of peace  
with my Empress here in Greece  
from this year 1892,  
when Sissy brought me to Corfu.  
[It was fun to have the Empress fawn  
on one so much more lowly born  
and so notorious a despiser  
of King and Emperor and Kaiser,  
those Krauts in crowns who used to squat  
on Europe's thrones but now do not  
wherever history's been rewritten,  
that's everywhere but backward Britain,  
but then I always found the English mind  
compared to Europe's lagged behind.]

My shrine was in the forest glade  
and up above she had displayed  
Apollo with the lyre that plays  
the darkness out of our dark days  
in old times when Apollo's lyre  
could save men from the petrifier.

For Sissy these weren't mere antiques,  
these Muses of the ancient Greeks.  
All the human spirit uses  
to keep life's colour were the Muses,  
or at least to Philhellenes like her  
and many of her age they were.

[She retired from the Imperial Court  
into art and poetry, music, thought,  
though I really wouldn't care to quote  
the poems she claimed my spirit wrote,



most of her lines are deadly dull  
 but in all her soul is 'like a gull'  
 or 'swallow' like the ones that flew  
 around her Muses in Corfu  
 and though a palisade of peace  
 surrounded Sissy and myself in Greece  
 it was nonetheless a palisade  
 where Sissy thought and wrote and played.]

Music Room:  
 Schumann *lied*  
 (piano)

How would all these Muses fare  
 when dragged screaming by the hair  
 to gaze into the Gorgon's stare?

*Dying Achilles*  
 by Ernst Herter  
 (1884)

The fatal wound, the calf, the thigh  
 of Achilles who's about to die.  
 This hero of Homeric fame  
 gave Elizabeth's retreat its name.  
 This Achilles of 1884  
 foresees the future world of war  
 and shows the Empress half aware  
 of horrors brewing in the air.  
 Her presentiment and pity shows  
 in the Achilles that she chose,  
 helpless, unheroic, dying  
 watching clouds and seabirds flying  
 and not one so-called 'Eternal Being'  
 the Gorgon gulls us into seeing.  
 First the dead man's gaze goes rotten  
 then flies fast, then he's forgotten  
 after those who used to shed  
 their tears for him are also dead,  
 unless a bard like Homer brings  
 the dead redemption when he sings.  
 Along with me the Empress/versifier  
 revered blind Homer and his lyre  
 the ancient poet whose *Iliad*  
 was the steadiest gaze we'd ever had  
 at war and suffering Sissy thought  
 before the wars this century's fought.  
 Though melancholic, steeped in grief

*Triumph of*  
*Achilles* by Franz  
 Matsch

Schumann *lied*  
 (piano only)

the Gorgon was a mere motif  
 for Sissy who was unafraid  
 to have the Gorgon's face portrayed  
 on ironwork or balustrade,  
 and this almost charming Gorgon stares  
 from wardrobe doors and boudoir chairs,  
 but unwittingly they laid the track  
 that brought the grimmer Gorgon back

[The palace style based on Pompeii's  
 might warn us of the Gorgon's gaze  
 but as her century drew to its close  
 still found poems in the rose,  
 the lily of loss and grieving hearts  
 until this closing century starts.]  
 The Empress posed above those roses  
 vanishes as her century doses  
 and the Muses she believed in threw  
 their roses to... I don't know who.  
 All the century's fresh bouquets  
 decayed beneath the Gorgon's gaze,  
 the grimmer Gorgon simply waited  
 till Sissy was assassinated  
 in the century's closing year,  
 which brought the German Kaiser here.  
 And when the Kaiser's gaze met mine  
 contemplating in my shrine,  
 the Kaiser's eye began to harden:  
*I don't want his kind in my garden.*  
 He said straightaway: *Get rid*  
*of Sissy's syphilitic Yid!*  
*Dammit! the man's a democrat*  
*I've got no time for shits like that.*  
 So once more the poet-refugee  
 was crated up and put to sea.  
 The crating up I had to face  
 the Kaiser wished on all my race.

And as the Kaiser wasn't keen  
 on Sissy's sentimental scene

of Achilles dying he'd make him stand and  
 represent the Fatherland.  
 He didn't like this sculpture much.  
 He liked his heroes much more butch,  
 more in his own imperious style.  
 He'd build an Achilles men could *heil!*

'Build my Achilles armour clad'  
 the Kaiser said, 'and confident in steel,  
 not some mama's little lad  
 with an arrow in his heel.

Make the wounded warrior stand  
 regrip his spear and gaze  
 through Sarajevo to the Fatherland,  
 the Lord of all that he surveys.

And put a Gorgon on his shield  
 to terrify his foes  
 wherever on Europe's battlefield  
 the Kaiser's Gorgon goes?  
 And that is almost everywhere  
 as gazers freeze in stony sleep  
 seeing her eyes and coiling hair  
 hissing like chlorine gas at Ypres.

Triumphant  
*Achilles* (statue)  
 by Johannes  
 GÖtz (1909)

Doors opening.  
*Triumph of  
 Achilles*  
 (painting)

The Kaiser, though a Homer freak,  
 despised the victim and the weak  
 and looking at Sissy's picture saw  
 Achilles riding high in war.  
 For him the focus of the painting  
 was triumph not some woman fainting,  
 but Sissy always used to see  
 Hector's wife, Andromache,  
 who has to gaze as Achilles hauls  
 her dead husband round Troy's walls.  
 The soon-to-be-defeated rows  
 of Trojans watch exultant foes  
 who bring the city to the ground  
 then leave it just a sandblown mound,  
 but the Greeks who'll watch Troy blaze

Statue of  
 ACHILLES

are also in the Gorgon's gaze,  
 the victims and the victimizer,  
 conquered and the conquering Kaiser,  
 Greeks and Trojans, Germans, Jews,  
 those who endure and those who use  
 the violence, that in different ways  
 keeps both beneath the Gorgon's gaze.  
 A whole culture vanished in the fire  
 until redeemed by Homer's lyre.  
 A lyre like Homer's could redeem  
 Hector's skull's still-echoing scream

Not like Sissy's Achilles sculpted dying  
 this one's triumphant, time defying.  
 The crane has hauled into the skies  
 the Kaiser in Homeric guise  
 (though not that you would recognize!)

Not only does this monster dwarf  
 the dissident from Dusseldorf  
 now newly banished from Corfu  
 it dwarfs all Sissy's Muses too.  
 What can lyre play or bard recite  
 the same scale as such armoured might  
 to face his gaze and still create?  
 Boxed up again inside a crate,  
 and forcibly reshipped  
 but still with pen and manuscript,  
 the shore receding, my last view  
 of my brief haven in Corfu,  
 hearing as cypresses recede a  
 fading phrase of my faint *lieder*,  
 was Achilles' spear whose gilded tip's  
 the Kaiser's signpost to Apocalypse.  
 Which of us, the marble Jew  
 the Kaiser kicked out of Corfu,  
 or armoured giant, him or me  
 would make it through the century?

Kaiser excavation stills	<p>The founder of the 'master race' put this inscription on its base. Those cavities in secret braille say: <i>All the Kaiser's work will fail!</i> but, wrought in characters of weighty lead, these pockmarks in the plinth once read: 'The greatest German to the greatest Greek.' Though not quite equal in physique the Kaiser's there in his creation, emblem of his warlike nation, this bellicose, Berlin-gazing totem has hornets nesting in his scrotum. Envenomed hordes have gone and built their teeming nests in Prussia's kilt, and perforate the scrotal sac of the tutued 'Teutomaniac'.</p>	Barbitos	<p>The patient Kaiser, piece by piece, prepares the Gorgon for release, the Gorgon he let out to glower above us all with baleful power.</p>
	<p>But while all this trouble's brewing what's the Prussian monarch doing? We read in his own writing, how, while all Europe geared for fighting, England, Belgium, France and Russia (but not of course his peaceful Prussia), what was Kaiser Wilhelm II up to? Excavating in Corfu, the scholar Kaiser on the scent of long lost temple pediment, not filling trenches, excavating the trenches where the Gorgon's waiting there in the trench to supervise the unearthing of the Gorgon's eyes.</p>		<p>The <i>barbitos</i>, the ancient lyre, since the Kaiser's day, is restrung with barbed wire. Bards' hands bleed when they play the score that fits an era's scream, the blood, the suffering, the loss. The twentieth-century theme is played on barbed wire <i>barbitos</i>.</p>
	<p>This isn't how warmongers are, this professor in a panama stooping as the spades laid bare the first glimpse of her snaky hair.</p>		<p>Terpsichore, the muse who sees her dances done by amputees. How can they hope to keep her beat when war's destroyed their dancing feet? Shelled at the Somme or gassed at Ypres, they shuffle, hobble, limp and creep and no matter what old air she plays they can't escape the Gorgon's gaze.</p>
	<p>The excavator with his find, a new art treasure for mankind.</p>	Melpomene with tragic mask	<p>The tragic mask of ancient days looked with eyes that never close straight into the Gorgon's gaze and sang Man's history through its throes.</p> <p>But now where is she when we need her? Tragedy's masks have changed their style. Lips like these won't sing my <i>lieder</i>. They've forgotten how to smile.</p> <p>What poems will this mouth recite? There'll be no Schumann sung from this. Before these Germans went to fight they'd been beautiful to kiss.</p> <p>This is the Kaiser's Gorgon choir, their petrification setting in, grunting to the barbed-wire lyre, gagging on snags of <i>Lohengrin</i>.</p>

Gorgon pediment	<p>With glaring eyes and hound-like snarls from the maze-bound Meanderthals, the Kaiser's Gorgon will preside over ghettos, gulags, genocide. Mankind meanders through the maze made rigid by the Gorgon's gaze. Following a more flowing shape might find us freedom and escape from the Gorgon and her excavator who gears his kind for horrors later. The Kaiser couldn't stand one Jew in marble near him in Corfu but the Kaiser's not uncommon views were just as vicious on all Jews: 'A poison fungus on the German oak' (to quote the bastard makes me choke!)</p> <p>This is how the Gorgon blinds her henchmen's eyes and rigid minds.</p>		<p>The junkie and the nationalist both get their fixes with clenched fist. And even in the ECU-world the Kaiser's flag's once more unfurled.</p>
		Ocean-borne bodies and Nazi flag	<p>My statue, meanwhile, got away with swastikas daubed on my face out of Hamburg to Marseilles to Toulon and a new safe base.</p>
		Statues of Gorgon's henchmen being demolished	<p>And apart from finger, nose and pen my statue's pretty much intact but those that let the Gorgon out on men are totally broken and cracked.</p>
		HEINE'S statue in Toulon	<p>My statue, meanwhile, got away with swastikas daubed on my face out of Hamburg to Marseilles to Toulon and a new safe base.</p>
Arrow motif on pediment	<p>The Gorgon worshippers unroll the barbed wire gulags round the soul. The Gorgon's henchmen try to force History on a straighter course with Gorgonisms that impose fixities on all that flows, with Führer fix and crucifix and Freedom-freezing politics, Each leader on his monstrous plinth waves us back into the labyrinth out of the meander and the maze straight back into the Gorgon's gaze.</p>		<p>And apart from finger, nose and pen my statue's pretty much intact, but those that let the Gorgon out on men are totally broken and cracked.</p>
Gorgon motif into swastika	<p>The Kaiser in his notebook drew where the Gorgon leads us to, step by step and stage by stage he steers the Gorgon through our age. Her hand on his unlocks the door that never will quite close on War.</p>		<p>Banished from the Fatherland still with my <i>lieder</i> in my hand though the pen the poems flowed from was shattered by an air-raid bomb, so being without it I recite as I do now what I can't write. The <i>lieder</i> Schumann makes so touching is in the manuscript I'm clutching. This manuscript with faded writing survived a century of fighting. Though war broke round this manuscript my broken hand has kept it gripped.</p>
		Toulon <i>lied</i> , Schumann arr. Kiszko	<p>[No longer hunted or hounded and safe and far from fear. If all the dogs are silenced why do my eyes shed this tear?</p>

	<p>The tears I let fall on the journey were falling for all I saw. Today I gaze on the ocean so far from the fear of war.</p> <p>The gloom that surrounds those frozen beneath the Gorgon's gaze now falls as the century's shadow to darken our hearts and days.</p> <p>And though I gaze in sunlight on springtime's brightest hues, no longer hunted and hounded, I weep for six million Jews.]</p> <p>But when through dappled shades of green I catch glimpses of a submarine, and across the ocean have to face through waving palms a naval base, it's then I'm reassured to know that just a hundred years ago when this rejected marble Jew escaped with Sissy to Corfu my other monument made its way to safe haven in the USA, safe from Europe's old alarms into the New World Order's arms.</p>	<p>Skull-lied, Schumann arr. Kiszko (soprano)</p>	<p>The closing century's shadow has darkened all our years and still the Gorgon's filling my empty sockets with tears.</p> <p>The tears I let fall in the desert the sand has all soaked away. My eyes and all that they gazed on are gone from the light of day.</p> <p>They've gone with these palls of blackness the smoking desert blaze. Will all of our freedoms and glories end up in the Gorgon's gaze? O so much life has vanished in smoking fiery skies.</p> <p>The closing century's shadow is cast across all our eyes.</p>
(End lied)		(end lied)	
		<i>Triumph of Achilles</i> (detail)	<p>The empty helmet of one whose eyes have gone to feast the desert flies, the eyes of one whose fate was sealed by Operation Desert Shield. They gazed their last these dark dark sockets on high-tech Coalition rockets.</p>
The Bronx, New York	<p>The Gorgon who's been running riot through the century now seems quiet, but supposing one who's watched her ways were to warn you that the Gorgon's gaze unburied in your day and I've glimpsed her even in the USA, you'll all reply he's crying wolf, but in the deserts of the Gulf steel pediments have Gorgon's eyes now grown as big as tank-wheel size that gaze down from her temple frieze on all her rigid devotees.</p>	Tourists	<p>Soon, in 1994, in this palace Greece starts to restore, in this the Kaiser's old retreat Europe's heads of state will meet, as the continent disintegrates once more into the separate states that waved their little flags and warred when the Kaiser's Gorgon was abroad.</p> <p>So to commemorate that rendezvous of ECU statesmen in Corfu I propose that in that year they bring the dissident back here, and to keep new Europe open-eyed they let the marble poet preside...</p>
Gulf War			

1 The year began with baleful auguries:  
2 comets, eclipses, tremors, forest fires,  
3 the waves lethargic under a coat of pitch  
4 the length of the coastline. And a cow spoke,  
5 which happened last year too, although last year  
6 no one believed cows spoke. Worse was to come.  
7 There was a bloody rain of lumps of meat  
8 which flocks of gulls snatched in mid-air  
9 while what they missed fell to the ground  
10 where it lay for days without festering.  
11 Then a wind tore up a forest of holm-oaks  
12 and jackdaws pecked the eyes from sheep.  
13 Officials construing the Sibylline books  
14 told of helmeted aliens occupying  
15 the crossroads, and high places of the city.  
16 Blood might be shed. Avoid, they warned,  
17 factions and in-fights. The tribunes claimed  
18 this was the usual con-trick  
19 trumped up to stonewall the new law  
20 about to be passed. Violence was only curbed  
21 by belief in a rumour that the tribes  
22 to the east had joined forces and forged  
23 weapons deadlier than the world has seen  
24 and that even then the hooves of their scouts  
25 had been heard in the southern hills.  
26 The year ended fraught with the fear of war.  
27 Next year began with baleful auguries.

## History Lesson

Philip Gross (1952) - *The All-Nite Café* (1993)

1 First, one  
2 in the crowd puts the eye on you---  
3 a nod to number two  
  
4 who gets the message  
5 and flips back something side-  
6 long, something snide  
  
7 that everybody hears  
8 but you. Soon three or four  
9 are in it. They'll make sure  
  
10 you catch the steel  
11 glint of the snigger they wear  
12 like a badge. And there  
  
13 come five or six  
14 together, casual, shouldering in  
15 around you with a single grin  
  
16 and nothing you say  
17 seems to reach them at all.  
18 The badmouthings they call  
  
19 mean only this:  
20 they want to scratch. You are the itch.  
21 A thousand years stand by, hissing *Witch!*  
  
22 *Nigger! Yid!*  
23 All you hear is silence lumbered  
24 shut around you. And the ten or hundred  
  
25 looking on  
26 look on. They are learning not to see.  
27 The bell rings, too late. Already  
  
28 this is history.





## Contrasts

Stewart Conn (1936) – *In the Blood* (1995)

A reverberant monument to pomposity and pride,  
Hamilton Mausoleum housed the sarcophagus  
*El Magnifico* bought as his last resting-place:  
despite chiselling Egyptian basalt out,  
for his insertion, sledge-hammers needed.

On the skyline the pink pavilion-towers  
of Chatelherault, the ducal *Dogg Kennells*;  
Adam's charred interiors ornately restored,  
the formal parterre and Cadzow cattle  
heightening the impression of a film set.

After such lavishness, leave the main road  
at a sign (easy to miss) pointing the way  
to a small church, loft and spire unfussy,  
a single row of weavers' cottages opposite;  
and the Dalserf ferry long-since obsolete,

sit as though marooned, history's shadows  
sifting and lengthening, looked down on  
by an obelisk to '*the Rev. John McMillan,*  
*Covenanter of Covenanters*'; an 11th century  
hogback grave-stone adding its *memento mori*.

Sarajevo, June 28, 1914

Anne Stevenson (1933) - *Granny Scarecrow* (2000)

1 Cramped under plumes of slaughtered cock,  
2 In uniform of High Command,  
3 Steps, to the ticking of a clock,  
4 Unfortunate Franz Ferdinand.

5 Bright upright teeth that prick the ground  
6 Are troops set out like painted toys.  
7 The drums beat loud, the sun beats down,  
8 The game awaits its player boys.

9 And now contingency meets fact.  
10 They drive in state along the quay.  
11 The Duchess in a picture hat  
12 Assumes imperial dignity.

13 The Duke, self-conscious, feeling stout,  
14 Stows his accoutrements of war.  
15 A nervous youth in black pulls out  
16 A pin, but fails to bomb their car.

17 What, scenting death, can an Archduke do  
18 But prove his blood, be madly brave,  
19 Look to the wounded, make a show,  
20 Snapping fat fingers at the grave?

21 Just such a rule directs this day.  
22 The Mayor makes his mayor's speech.  
23 Then Duke and Duchess drive away  
24 To luncheon they will never reach.

Sonnets for August 1945

Tony Harrison (1937) - *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1993)

**1. *The Morning After***

**I.**

- 1 The fire left to itself might smoulder weeks.
- 2 Phone cables melt. Paint peels from off back gates.
- 3 Kitchen windows crack; the whole street reeks
- 4 of horsehair blazing. Still it celebrates.
  
- 5 Though people weep, their tears dry from the heat.
- 6 Faces flush with flame, beer, sheer relief
- 7 and such a sense of celebration in our street
- 8 for me it still means joy though banked with grief.
  
- 9 And that, now clouded, sense of public joy
- 10 with war-worn adults wild in their loud fling
- 11 has never come again since as a boy
- 12 I saw Leeds people dance and heard them sing.
  
- 13 There's still that dark, scorched circle on the road.
- 14 The morning after kids like me helped spray
- 15 hissing upholstery spring wire that still glowed
- 16 and cobbles boiling with black gas tar for VJ.

## II.

1 The Rising Sun was blackened on those flames.  
2 The jabbering tongues of fire consumed its rays.  
3 Hiroshima, Nagasaki were mere names  
4 for us small boys who gloried in our blaze.

5 The blood-red ball, first burnt to blackout shreds,  
6 took hovering batwing on the bonfire's heat  
7 above the *Rule Britannias* and the bobbing heads  
8 of the VJ hokey-cokey in our street.

9 The kitchen blackout cloth became a cloak  
10 for me to play at fiend Count Dracula in.  
11 I swirled it near the fire. It filled with smoke.  
12 Heinz ketchup dribbled down my vampire's chin.

13 That circle of scorched cobbles scarred with tar's  
14 a night-sky globe nerve-rackingly all black,  
15 both hemispheres entire but with no stars,  
16 an Archerless zilch, a Scaleless zodiac.

## 2. *Old Soldier*

1 Last years of Empire and the fifth of War  
2 and *Camp* coffee extract on the kitchen table.  
3 The Sikh that served the officer I saw  
4 on the label in the label in the label  
5 continuously cloned beyond my eyes,  
6 beyond the range of any human staring,  
7 down to amoeba, atom, neutron size,  
8 but the turbaned bearer never lost his bearing  
9 and nothing shook the bottle off his tray.  
10 Through all infinity and down to almost zero  
11 he holds out and can't die or fade away  
12 loyal to the breakfasting Scots hero.

13 But since those two high summer days  
14 the U. S. dropped the World's first A-bombs on,  
15 from that child's forever what returns my gaze  
16 is a last chuprassie with all essence gone.

### 3. *The Figure*

1 In each of our Blackpool photos from those years  
2 and, I'll bet, in every family's South Pier snap,  
3 behind the couples with their children on the pier, 's  
4 the same figure standing in frayed suit and cap.

5 We'd come to plunge regardless in the sea,  
6 ball-shrivellingly chill, but subs all gone,  
7 gorge Mrs Moore's Full Board, now ration-free,  
8 glad when *I - Speak - Your - Weight* showed pounds put on.

9 The first snap that I have 's from '45.  
10 I've never seen a family group so glad  
11 of its brief freedom, so glad to be alive,  
12 no camera would have caught them looking sad.

13 He's there, in the same frayed suit, in '51,  
14 that figure in each photo at the back  
15 who sent us all sauntering towards the sun  
16 and the tripod, and the biped draped in black.

#### **4. *Black & White***

1 If we had the cameras then we've got today  
2 since Oblivion, always deep, grew even deeper  
3 the moment of the flash that made VJ  
4 and the boom made almost pro ones so much cheaper,  
5 I'd have snaps of me happy and pre-teen  
6 in pale, affordable Fuji for the part  
7 of innocence that never could have been  
8 born just in time to see the World War start.

9 The ugly ducklings changed to sitting ducks!

10 Now everything gets clicked at the loud clock  
11 the shots and shutters sound like 's Captain Hook's  
12 ticking implacably inside the croc.

13 If he wants his shadow back the Peter Pan  
14 who cowers since Hiroshima in us all  
15 will have to keep returning to Japan  
16 till the blast-cast shape walks with him off the wall.

## 5. *Snap*

1 Uncle Wilf in khaki but decapitated,  
2 and he'd survived the jungle and the Japs,  
3 so his grin 's gone when we all celebrated  
4 Hirohito's empire in collapse.

5 My shorter father 's all in and looks glad  
6 and full of euphoria he'd never found  
7 before, or since, and I'm with the grocer's lad  
8 two fingers turned the positive way round!

9 Innocence, that fraying Kirby wire  
10 that briefly held the whole weight of the nation  
11 over the common element of fire  
12 that bonded the A-bomb blast to celebration,  
13 our VJ bonfire to Jehovahspeak,  
14 the hotline Jesus got instructions from,  
15 and, at Pentecost, Apostles their technique  
16 of saying in every language: *Ban the Bomb!*



## **6. *First Aid in English***

1 *First Aid in English* , my first grammar book  
2 with a cross on the light blue cover of dark blue  
3 drilled into a [?] of parrots that one rook  
4 became a congregation when it's two.

5 We chanted gaggle, bevy, coven, herd  
6 between the Nazi and the Japanese defeat.  
7 Did even the dodo couple have its word  
8 that became, in the last one's lifetime, obsolete?

9 Collective nouns but mostly bird or beast.  
10 Ghetto and gulag weren't quite current then.  
11 The fauna of our infancies decreased  
12 as new nouns grew collectivising men.

13 Cats in their clowder, lions in their pride,  
14 but there's no aid in English, first or last,  
15 for a [ Fill in the Blank ] of genocide  
16 or more than one [ Please Tick ] atomic blast.

## 7. *The Birds of Japan*

1 Campi Phlegraei, Lake Nyos of Wum,  
2 their sulphur could asphyxiate whole flocks  
3 but combustibility had not yet come  
4 to the femto-seconds of the *Fiat Nox*:  
5 men made magma, flesh made fumaroles,  
6 first mottled by the flash to brief mofettes  
7 and Hiroshima's fast pressurising souls  
8 hissed through the fissures in mephitic jets.

9 Did the birds burst into song as they ignited  
10 above billowing waves of cloud up in the sky,  
11 hosannahs too short-lived to have alighted  
12 on a Bomb-Age Basho, or a Hokusai?

13 Apostles of that pinioned Pentecost  
14 of chirrupings cremated on the wing  
15 will have to talk their ghosts down, or we're lost.  
16 Until we know what they sang, who can sin

## AT MAUTHAUSEN CAMP

Anna Adams (1926-2011): - *Green Resistance: New and Selected Poems* (1996)

*If there is a god, he will have to beg me for forgiveness.*

*(Graffiti at Mauthausen Camp)*

1 To use such sufferings  
2 as raw material  
3 for art, is not permitted;  
4 and yet I wish to add  
5 a token, like those flowers  
6 on the Italians' wall.  
7 I wish the dead could know  
8 that we know how they died,  
9 that we might touch their hands.  
10 No monument can do it,  
11 no bronze, no rusting iron,  
12 nor formalised barbed wire,  
13 nor Berthold Brecht quotations.  
14 Perhaps this crown of thorns  
15 with name-tags speared on each  
16 pitiless spike, says something.  
17 These photographs of faces  
18 when they had flesh on them  
19 express that they were loved  
20 and individual  
21 but cannot bring them back.  
22 Perhaps they haunt the stairs---  
23 these steep and broken stairs  
24 that sweep down to the quarry  
25 like a dry waterfall  
26 that was a fall of men:  
27 but they cannot return  
28 to vulnerable sense  
29 to be abused again,  
30 and would not if they could.  
31 It is our minds they haunt.

32 By climbing up those stairs  
33 and resting only once  
34 I made my offering.  
35 What use was that? No use.  
36 It proved that I am lucky  
37 in living on past sixty.  
38 I see the species-rich  
39 meadow above mass graves  
40 where Yugoslavs and Poles,  
41 Hungarians and Jews,  
42 Bulgarians and Danes,  
43 Dutchmen and Frenchmen lie  
44 by Germans and Italians.  
45 I think: The Earth forgives.  
46 Forgiveness is not just.  
47 There can be no amends  
48 except remembering  
49 bloodfalls where starved men fell  
50 beneath heartbreaking stones  
51 and each was I---and I---  
52 and I---

Verdun

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

*In memory of Franz Marc*

1 Thistles, poppies, blue cranesbill  
2 by a dusty road.  
3 In front, under the cloud stack  
4 of an August sky,  
5 the chalk ridge.

6 *Trees, flowers, the earth*  
7 *all showed me every year*  
8 *more and more of their deformity.*  
9 *I dream of a new Europe.*

10 On a bluff a machine-gun post,  
11 an iron mask with two eye-holes,  
12 looks down on new growth.

13 Inside, the remains of a gun,  
14 rusted and twisted.  
15 The emptiness smells of fear.

16 The mask that blinded  
17 has survived the face. It overlooks  
18 slopes with harebells and young pines.

19 *In spiritual matters new ideas*  
20 *kill better than steel.*

21 The blood throbs, pulses.  
22                   This is the rhythm  
23 in all things.

24 Deer feel the world as deer,  
25 but whose landscape is this?

26 In the woods the war rages  
27 with fiery signs.

28 All things, all creatures  
29 are on fire. *All being*  
30 *is flaming suffering.*

31 Under pine needles, the earth  
32 that bled for purity  
33 is matter,  
34 pulped and shattered.

35 In the immaculate cemetery  
36 each white cross has a red rose  
37 that smells sweet.

38 The Ossuary gleams  
39 above trees and graves.

40 Whose temple is this?  
41                                      Whose dream?

42 The tower is shaped  
43 in the image of a shell  
44 that blasted bodies to bits  
45 but released the soul.

46 On the tower, the cross.

47 EN MEMOIRE DE FLEURY DEVANT DOUAMONT

48 She is Our Lady of Europe,  
49 her chapel stands on rubble  
50 under pines, on blasted,  
51 cratered ground.

52 The woods are dark and still

53 where the village was,  
54 but the chapel in a glade  
55 is filled with sunlight.

56 A white butterfly wanders in  
57 and flutters outside the porch  
58 as though it, too, were in the picture.

59 New Year 1916. *The world*  
60 *is richer by the bloodiest war*  
61 *of its many-thousand-year history .*

62 *And all for nothing.*

V. E. Day

Peter Scupham (1933) - *The Air Show* (1988)

*Carpamus dulcia: nostrum est  
Quod vivis: cinis, et manes, et fabula fies.*

*PERSIUS: Sat. V*

- 1 Noticing oddly how flags had been rubbed thin,
- 2 Bleaching in shut drawers, now unrolled
- 3 In blues, reds, their creases of old skin
- 4 Tacked on brown lances, headed with soft gold.
- 5 Clotheslines of bunting,
- 6 And light fresh at the front door, May
- 7 Switching the sky with stray bits of green,
- 8 The road levelling off; the day much like a day
- 9 Others could be, and others might have been.
- 10 A woman laughing,
- 11 Sewing threadbare cotton to windy air,
- 12 The house open: hands, curtains leaning out
- 13 To the same gravel, the same anywhere, everywhere.
- 14 Birds remain birds, cats cats, messing about
- 15 In the back garden.
- 16 And a table-land of toys to be put away,
- 17 To wither and shrivel back to Homeric names.
- 18 Scraps gathering myth and rust, the special day
- 19 Moving to its special close: columnar flames
- 20 Down to a village bonfire
- 21 In which things seasoned and unseasoned burn



22 Through their black storeys, and the mild night  
23 Fuels the same fires with the same unconcern:  
24 Dresden, Ilium, London: the witch-light  
25 Bright on a ring of children.

26 Night, and the huge bombers lying cold to touch,  
27 The bomb-bays empty under the perspex skull.  
28 The pyres chill, that ate so fiercely, and so much,  
29 The flags out heavily: the stripes charcoal, dull.  
30 Ashes, ghosts, fables.

BC-AD

John Heath-Stubbs (1918-2006) - *The Game of Love and Death* (1990)

- 1 The *Pax Romana* ---spurious:
- 2 A knock-out blow, delivered
- 3 By the most ruthless contender
- 4 Among a band of rival thugs.
  
- 5 The good roads are for the tax-gatherers;
- 6 The military discipline, the legions' tread,
- 7 For the extending boundaries.
  
- 8 Neck and foot the slaves are shackled.
- 9 In specious freedom, the barbarian,
- 10 Lousy, wrapped in a tattered hide,
- 11 Scuttles about the frontier,
- 12 Drinking kumiss from his grandfather's skull.
  
- 13 Famine and pestilence an ambient sea,
- 14 Too turbid for the halcyons' brooding.
  
- 15 In all this darkness, one small point of light---it shines
- 16 Out of a foul stable, between
- 17 A pair of commonplace quadrupeds.
  
- 18 It burns, now blue as the heavens of faith,
- 19 Now green as the hopeful shoots of spring,
- 20 Now fiery red like pain.
  
- 21 And from this seed expands
- 22 The lover's rose, the rose of revolution,
- 23 And shall continue to expand until
- 24 It touches the limits of eternity.

Tony Harrison (1937) – V. (1985)

Next millennium you'll have to search quite hard  
to find my slab behind the family dead,  
butcher, publican, and baker, now me, bard  
adding poetry to their beef, beer and bread.

With Byron three graves on I'll not go short  
of company, and Wordsworth's opposite.  
That's two peers already, of a sort,  
and we'll all be thrown together if the pit,

whose galleries once ran beneath this plot,  
causes the distinguished dead to drop  
into the rabblement of bone and rot,  
shored slack, crushed shale, smashed prop.

Wordsworth built church organs, Byron tanned  
luggage cowhide in the age of stearn,  
and knew their place of rest before the land  
caves in on the lowest worked-out seam.

This graveyard on the brink of Beeston Hill's  
the place I may well rest if there's a spot  
under the rose roots and the daffodils  
by which dad dignified the family plot.

If buried ashes saw then I'd survey  
the places I learned Latin, and learned Greek,  
and left, the ground where Leeds United play  
but disappoint their fans week after week,

which makes them lose their sense of self-esteem  
and taking a short cut home through these graves here  
they reassert the glory of their team  
by spraying words on tombstones, pissed on beer.

This graveyard stands above a worked-out pit.  
Subsidence makes the obelisks all list.  
One leaning left's marked FUCK, one right's marked SHIT  
sprayed by some peeved supporter who was pissed.

Far-sighted for his family's future dead,  
but for his wife, this banker's still alone  
on his long obelisk, and doomed to head  
a blackened dynasty of unclaimed stone,

now graffitied with a crude four-letter word.  
His children and grandchildren went away  
and never came back home to be interred,  
so left a lot of space for skins to spray.

The language of this graveyard ranges from  
a bit of Latin for a former Mayor  
or those who laid their lives down at the Somme,  
the hymnal fragments and the gilded prayer,

how people 'fell asleep in the Good Lord',  
brief chisellable bits from the good book  
and rhymes whatever length' they could afford,  
to CUNT, PISS, SHIT and (mostly) FUCK!

Or, more expansively, there's LEEDS v.  
the opponent of last week, this week, or next,  
and a repertoire of blunt four-letter curses  
on the team or race that makes the sprayer vexed.

Then, pushed for time, or fleeing some observer,  
dodging between tall family vaults and trees  
like his team's best ever winger, dribbler, swerver,  
fills every space he finds with versus Vs.

Vs sprayed on the run at such a lick,  
the sprayer master of his flourished tool,  
get short-armed on the left like that red tick  
they never marked his work much with at school.

Half this skinhead's age but with approval  
I helped whitewash a V on a brick wall.  
No one clamoured in the press for its removal  
or thought the sign, in wartime, rude at all.

These Vs are all the versuses of life  
from LEEDS v. DERBY, Black/White  
and (as I've known to my cost) man v. wife,  
Communist v. Fascist, Left v. Right,

class v. class as bitter as before,  
the unending violence of US and THEM,  
personified in 1984  
by Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM,

Hindu/Sikh, soul/body, heart v. mind,  
East/West, male/female, and the ground  
these fixtures are fought out on's Man, resigned  
to hope from his future what his past never found.

The prospects for the present aren't too grand  
when a swastika with NF (National Front)'s  
sprayed on a grave, to which another hand  
has added, in a reddish colour, CUNTS.

Which is, I grant, the word that springs to mind,  
when going to clear the weeds and rubbish thrown  
on the family plot by football fans, I find  
UNITED graffitied on my parents' stone.

How many British graveyards now this May  
are strewn with rubbish and choked up with weeds  
since families and friends have gone away  
for work or fuller lives, like me from Leeds?

When I first came here 40 years ago  
with my dad to 'see my grandma' I was 7.  
I helped dad with the flowers. He let me know  
she'd gone to join my grandad up in Heaven.

My dad who came each week to bring fresh flowers  
came home with clay stains on his trouser knees.  
Since my parents' deaths I've spent 2 hours  
made up of odd 10 minutes such as these.

Flying visits once or twice a year,

and though I'm horrified just who's to blame  
that I find instead of flowers cans of beer  
and more than one grave sprayed with some skin's name?

Where there were flower urns and troughs of water  
and mesh receptacles for withered flowers  
are the HARP tins of some skinhead Leeds supporter.  
It isn't all his fault though. Much is ours.

5 kids, with one in goal, play 2-a-side.  
When the ball bangs on the hawthorn that's one post  
and petals fall they hum *Here Comes the Bride*  
though not so loud they'd want to rouse a ghost.

They boot the ball on purpose at the trunk  
and make the tree shed showers of shrivelled may.  
I look at this word graffitied by some drunk  
and I'm in half a mind to let it stay.

(Though honesty demands that I say *if*  
I'd wanted to take the necessary pains  
to scrub the skin's inscription off  
I only had an hour between trains.

So the feelings that I had as I stood gazing  
and the significance I saw could be a sham,  
mere excuses for not patiently erasing  
the word sprayed on the grave of dad and mam.)

This pen's all I have of magic wand.  
I know this world's so torn but want no other  
except for dad who'd hoped from 'the beyond'  
a better life than this one, *with* my mother.

Though I don't believe in afterlife at all  
and know it's cheating it's hard *not* to make  
a sort of furtive prayer from this skin's scrawl,  
his UNITED mean 'in Heaven' for their sake,

an accident of meaning to redeem  
an act intended as mere desecration

and make the thoughtless spraying of his team  
apply to higher things, and to the nation.

Some, where kids use aerosols, use giant signs  
to let the people know who's forged their fetters  
like PRI CE O WALES above West Yorkshire mines  
(no prizes for who nicked the missing letters!).

The big blue star for booze, tobacco ads,  
the magnet's monogram, the royal crest,  
insignia in neon dwarf the lads  
who spray a few odd FUCKS when they're depressed.

Letters of transparent tubes and gas  
in Dusseldorf are blue and flash out KRUPP.  
Arms are hoisted for the British ruling class  
and clandestine, genteel aggro keeps them up.

And there's HARRISON on some Leeds building sites  
I've taken in fun as blazoning my name,  
which I've also seen on books, in Broadway lights,  
so why can't skins with spraycans do the same?

But why inscribe these *graves* with CUNT and SHIT?  
Why choose neglected tombstones to disfigure?  
This pitman's of last century daubed PAKIGIT,  
this grocer Broadbent's aerosolled with NIGGER?

They're there to shock the living, not arouse  
the dead from their deep peace to lend support  
for the causes skinhead spraycans could espouse.  
The dead would want their desecrators caught!

Jobless though they are how can these kids,  
even though their team's lost one more game,  
believe that the 'Pakis', 'Niggers', even 'Yids'  
sprayed on the tombstones here should bear the blame?

What is it that these crude words are revealing?  
What is it that this aggro act implies?  
Giving the dead their xenophobic feeling

or just a *cri-de-coeur* because man dies?

*So what's a cri-de-coeur, cunt? Can't you speak  
the language that yer mam spoke. Think of 'er!  
Can yer only get yer tongue round fucking Greek?  
Go and fuck yerself with cri-de-coeur!*

'She didn't talk like you do for a start!'  
I shouted, turning where I thought the voice had been.  
*She didn't understand yer fucking 'art'!*  
*She thought yer fucking poetry obscene!*

I wish on this skin's word deep aspirations,  
first the prayer for my parents I can't make,  
then a call to Britain and to all the nations  
made in the name of love for peace's sake.

*Aspirations, cunt! Folk on t'fucking dole  
'ave got about as much scope to aspire  
above the shit they're dumped in, cunt, as coal  
aspires to be chucked on t'fucking fire.*

'OK, forget the aspirations. Look, I know  
United's losing gets you fans incensed  
and how far the HARP inside you makes you go  
but *all* these Vs: against! against! against!'

*Ah'll tell yer then what really riles a bloke.  
It's reading on their graves the jobs they did-  
butcher, publican and baker. Me, I'll croak  
doing t'same noun ah do now as a kid.*

*'ard birth ah war, mi mam says, almost killed 'er.  
Death after life on t'dole won't seem as 'ard!  
Look at this cunt, Wordsworth, organ builder,  
this fucking' aberdasher Appleyard!*

*If mi mam's up there, don't want to meet 'er  
listening to me list mi dirty deeds,  
and 'ave to pipe up to St fucking Peter  
ah've been on t'dole all mi life in fucking Leeds!*



*Then t'Alleluias stick in t'angels' gobs.  
When dole-wallahs fuck off to the void  
uihat'll t'mason carve up for their jobs?  
The cunts who lieth 'ere war unemployed?*

*This lot worked at one job all life through.  
Byron, 'Tanner', 'Lieth 'ere interred'.  
They'll chisel fucking poet when they do you  
and that, yer cunt, 's a crude four-letter word.*

*'Listen, cunt!' I said, 'before you start your jeering  
the reason why I want this in a book  
's to give ungrateful cunts like you a hearing!'  
A book, yer stupid cunt, 's not worth a fuck!*

*'The only reason why I write this poem at all  
on yobs like you who 'do the dirt on death  
's to give some higher meaning to your scrawl.'  
Don't fucking bother, cunt! Don't waste your breath!*

*'You piss-artist skinhead cunt, you wouldn't know  
and it doesn't fucking matter if you do,  
the skin and poet united fucking Rimbaud  
but the *autre* that *je est* is fucking you.'*

*Ah've told yer, no more Greek... That's yer last warning!  
Ah'll boot yer fucking balls to Kingdom Come.  
They'll find yer cold on t'grave tomorrer morning.  
So don't speak Greek. Don't treat me like I'm dumb.*

*'I've done my bits of mindless aggro too  
not half a mile from where we're standing now.'  
Yeah, ah bet yer wrote a poem, yer wanker you!  
'No, shut yer gob a while. Ah'll tell yer 'ow...'*

*'Herman Darewski's band played operetta  
with a wobbly soprano warbling. Just why  
I made my mind up that I'd got to get her  
with the fire hose I can't say, but I'll try.*

*It wasn't just the singing angered me.  
At the same time half a crowd was jeering  
as the smooth Hugh Gaitskell, our MP,*

made promises the other half were cheering.

What I hated in those high soprano ranges  
was uplift beyond all reason and control  
and in a world where you say nothing changes  
it seemed a sort of prick-tease of the soul.

I tell you when I heard high notes that rose  
above Hugh Gaitskell's cool electioneering  
straight from the warbling throat right up my nose  
I had all your aggro in *my* jeering.

And I hit the fire extinguisher ON knob  
and covered orchestra and audience with spray.  
I could run as fast you then. A good job!  
They yelled 'damned vandal' after me that day...'

*And then yer saw the light and gave up 'eavy!  
And knew a man's not how much he can sup...  
Yer reward for growing up's this super-bevvy,  
a meths and champagne punch in t'FA Cup.*

*Ah've 'eard all that from old farts past their prime.  
'ow now yer live wi' all yer once detested...  
Old farts with not much left'll give me time.  
Fuckers like that get folk like me arrested.*

*Covet not thy neighbour's wife, thy neighbour's riches.  
Vicar and cop who say, to save our souls,  
Get thee beHind me, Satan, drop their breeches  
and get the Devil's dick right up their 'oles!*

It was more a *working* marriage that I'd meant,  
a blend of masculine and feminine.  
Ignoring me, he started looking, bent  
on some more aerosolling, for his tin.

'It was more a *working* marriage that I mean!'  
*Fuck, and save mi soul, eh? That suits me.*  
Then as if I'd egged him on to be obscene  
he added a middle slit to one daubed V.

*Don't talk to me of fucking representing*

*the class yer were bam into any more.  
Yer going to get 'urt and start resenting  
it's not poetry we need in this class war.*

*Yer've given yerself toffee, cunt. Who needs  
yer fucking poufy words. Ah write mi own.  
Ah 've got mi work on show all ovver Leeds  
like this UNITED 'ere on some sod's stone.*

'OK!' (thinking I had him trapped) 'OK!'  
'If you're so proud of it, then sign your name  
when next you're full of HARP and armed with spray,  
next time you take this short cut from the game.'

He took the can, contemptuous, unhurried  
and cleared the nozzle and prepared to sign  
the UNITED sprayed where mam and dad were buried.  
He aerosolled his name. And it was mine.

The boy footballers bawl *Here Comes the Bride*  
and drifting blossoms fall onto my head.  
One half of me's alive but one half died  
when the skin half sprayed my name among the dead.

Half versus half, the enemies within  
the heart that can't be whole till they unite.  
As I stoop to grab the crushed HARPlager tin  
the day's already dusk, half dark, half light.

That UNITED that I'd wished onto the nation  
or as reunion for dead parents soon recedes.  
The word's once more a mindless desecration  
by some HARPoholic yob supporting Leeds.

Almost the time for ghosts I'd better scam.  
Though not given much to fears of spooky scaring  
I don't fancy an encounter with mi mam  
playing Hamlet with me for this swearing.

Though I've a train to catch my step is slow.  
I walk on the grass and graves with wary tread  
over these subsidences, these shifts below

the life of Leeds supported by the dead.

Further underneath's that cavernous hollow  
that makes the gravestones lean towards the town.  
A matter of mere time and it will swallow  
this place of rest and all the resters down.

I tell myself I've got, say, 30 years.  
At 75 this place will suit me fine.  
I've never feared the grave but what I fear's  
that great worked-out black hollow under mine.

Not train departure time, and not Town Hall  
with the great white clock face I can see,  
coal, that began, with no man here at all,  
as 300 million-year-old plant debris.

5 kids still play at making blossoms fall  
and humming as they do *Here Comes the Bride*.  
They never seem to tire of their ball  
though I hear a woman's voice call one inside.

2 larking boys play bawdy bride and groom.  
3 boys in Leeds strip la-la *Lohengrin*,  
I hear them as I go through growing gloom  
still years away from being skald or skin.

The ground's carpeted with petals as I throw  
the aerosol, the HARP can, the cleared weeds  
on top of dad's dead daffodils, then go,  
with not one glance behind, away from Leeds.

The bus to the station's still the No. 1  
but goes by routes that I don't recognise.  
I look out for known landmarks as the sun  
reddens the swabs of cloud in darkening skies.

Home, home, home, to my woman as the red  
darkens from a fresh blood to a dried.  
Home, home to my woman, home to bed  
where opposites seem sometimes unified.

A pensioner in turban taps his stick  
along the pavement past the corner shop,  
that sells samosas now, not beer on tick,  
to the Kashmir Muslim Club that was the Co-op.

House after house FOR SALE where we'd played cricket  
with white roses cut from flour-sacks on our caps,  
with stumps chalked on the coal-grate for our wicket,  
and everyone bought now by 'coloured chaps',

dad's most liberal label as he felt squeezed  
by the unfamiliar, and fear  
of foreign food and faces, when he smelt  
curry in the shop where he'd bought beer.

And growing frailer, 'wobbly on his pins',  
the shops he felt familiar with withdrew  
which meant much longer tiring treks for tins  
that had a label on them that he knew.

And as the shops that stocked his favourites receded  
whereas he'd fancied beans and popped next door,  
he found that four long treks a week were needed  
till he wondered what he bothered eating for.

The supermarket made him feel embarrassed.  
Where people bought whole lambs for family freezers  
he bought baked beans from check-out girls too harassed  
to smile or swap a joke with sad old geezers.

But when he bought his cigs he'd have a chat,  
his week's one conversation, truth to tell,  
but time also came and put a stop to that  
when old Wattsy got bought out by M. Patel.

And there, 'Time like an ever rolling stream' 's  
what I once trilled behind that boarded front.  
A 1000 ages made coal-bearing seams  
and even more the hand that sprayed this CUNT

on both Methodist and C of E billboards  
once divided in their fight for local souls.  
Whichever house more truly was the Lord's  
both's pews are filled with cut-price toilettrolls.

Home, home to my woman, never to return  
till sexton or survivor has to cram  
the bits of clinker scooped out of my urn  
down through the rose-roots to my dad and mam.

Home, home to my woman, where the fire's lit  
these still chilly mid-May evenings, home to you,  
and perished vegetation from the pit  
escaping insubstantial up the flue.

Listening to *Lulu*, in our hearth we burn,  
as we hear the high Cs rise in stereo,  
what was lush swamp club-moss and tree-fern  
at least 300 million years ago.

Shilbottle cobbles, Alban Berg high D  
lifted from a source that bears your name,  
the one we hear decay, the one we see,  
the fern from the foetid forest, as brief flame.

This world, with far too many people in,  
starts on the TV logo as a taw,  
then ping-pong, tennis, football; then one spin  
to show us all, then shots of the Gulf War.

As the coal with reddish dust cools in the grate  
on the late-night national news we see  
police v. pickets at a coke-plant gate,  
old violence and old disunity.

The map that's colour-coded Ulster/Eire's  
flashed on again as almost every night.  
Behind a tiny coffin with two bearers  
men in masks with arms show off their might.

The day's last images recede to first a glow

and then a ball that shrinks back to blank screen.  
Turning to love, and sleep's oblivion, I know  
what the UNITED that the skin sprayed *has* to mean.

Hanging my clothes up, from my parka hood  
may and apple petals, browned and creased  
fall onto the carpet and bring back the flood  
of feelings their first falling had released.

I hear like ghosts from all Leeds matches humming  
with one concerted voice the bride, the bride  
I feel united to, *my* bride is coming  
into the bedroom, naked, to my side.

The ones we choose to love become our anchor  
when the hawser of the blood-tie's hacked, or frays.  
But a voice that scorns chorales is yelling: *Wanker!*  
It's the aerosolling skin I met today's.

My *alter ego* wouldn't want to know it  
his aerosol vocab would balk at LOVE'  
the skin's UNITED underwrites the poet'  
the measures carved below the ones above.

I doubt if 30 years of bleak Leeds weather  
and 30 falls of apple and of may  
will erode the UNITED binding us together.  
And now it's your decision: does it stay?

Next millennium you'll have to search quite hard  
to find out where I'm buried but I'm near  
the grave of haberdasher Appleyard,  
the pile of HARPs, or some new neoned beer.

Find Byron, Wordsworth, or turn left between  
one grave marked Broadbent, one marked Richardson.  
Bring some solution with you that can clean  
whatever new crude words have been sprayed on.

If love of art, or love, gives you affront  
that the grave I'm in's graffitied then, maybe,

erase the more offensive FUCK and CUNT  
but leave, with the worn UNITED, one small v.

Victory? For vast, slow, coal-creating forces  
that hew the body's seams to get the soul.  
Will Earth run out of her 'diurnal courses'  
before repeating her creation of black coal?

But choose a day like I chose in mid-May  
or earlier when apple and hawthorn tree,  
no matter if boys boot their ball all day,  
cling to their blossoms and won't shake them free.

If, having come this far, somebody reads  
these verses, and he/she wants to understand,  
face this grave on Beeston Hill, your back to Leeds,  
and read the chiselled epitaph I've planned:

*Beneath your feet's a poet, then a pit.  
Poetry supporter, if you're here to find  
how poems can grow from (beat you to it!) SHIT  
find the beef, the beer, the bread, then look behind.*



Fenlight

Gillian Allnutt (1949) – *Nantucket and the Angel* (1997)

Alan of Walsingham, Sacrist, practical man -  
*quo se verteret vel quid ageret,*  
*not knowing which way to turn nor what to do -*  
know vertigo -  
as if the Isle of Ely had gone down  
into the fen -  
as if his spine were broken - knows  
he must invent the earth again and God  
and therefore send to Stamford  
for new stone.

His job is to imagine, to administrate  
materials and men. His mind's  
dismantled. First he's only able to invent the erstwhile -  
transept, chancel, nave - not  
penetrate the unimaginable  
hole where-  
*quo se verteret vel quid ageret -*  
the ordinary fenlight enters and it feels  
as if the sparrows flying in and out  
are flying in his heart.

His job's to order men and boats to bring out more  
of that once wholly to be trusted  
Barnack stone  
and build again -  
but he is momentarily unsure.

During the night of 12 February 1322 the central tower of Ely Cathedral collapsed. **It** was subsequently replaced with the octagon and lantern. The Latin, quoted from a record of the time, is translated in the text of the poem.

## DRUID SONG

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Their Silence a Language* (1993)

Who keeps the vert and the venison?  
Who calls the creatures into a circle?

The stag-headed one,  
bearded with green leaves,  
lies down with the tree that was windthrown  
in its prime,  
the lightning-shattered,  
all the litter of the seasons.

These come again---  
new wood, timber.

But Thor's tree is down,  
the groves of the oakmen are felled.

There is no leaf, no twig  
that does not grow upon the tree of life.

Where is the tree that will rise  
to lift up the image of its maker?

## A Café Waiter in Tel Aviv

Ian Duhig (1954) - *The Bradford Count* (1991)

*'O to be a café waiter in Tel Aviv!'* - KAFKA

'We did not come from Russia to mix with blacks  
or listen to their nigger-music!' 'Kurdish,'  
whispered the guitarist, 'Perhaps it should be kaddish.'  
His knife flicked open - the bar doors slammed shut.  
'Drinks, waiter, I have made your café  
Judenrein. Perhaps Hitler could have used me.'  
'For shame, guitarist, you are still a Jew.'  
'I'm told. But let me tell some things to you;

round Krakow my grandfather dug white lime,  
practised Pilpul till the Tartar pogrom.  
He fled west for Mendelssohn's Haskalah,  
wed an Ashkenazi and taught High German  
for low pay. Old Zvi met Marx - you know  
his *On the Jewish Question*? "Money  
is the God of Israel. The exchange-token  
is the Jealous God of the Jew."

In 1933 Papa also learned:

"Framing these codes I have kept before me  
the laws of Ezra and Nehemiah."  
Thus spoke the drafter of the Nuremberg  
Race Purity Laws. You know the rest –  
boots in the night; the family dispersed.  
I worked Rothschild's vineyards in Algeria  
with Yemenite Jews, Jews from Libya.

"It is not more land we need, but more Jews!"  
Ben-Gurion cried. We were smuggled in  
by night, like arms, stashed in the maabaras,  
the transit camps. Russian Jews had barracks  
with bunks and stoves and portraits of Stalin.  
We slept in sacks and dug hollows for our hips.  
They bussed us round to break up Arab strikes,  
harass their wives at market, burn their crops.

Papa did not approve my new career.

I left "resettlement" for the guitar.

I'm told Bialik, our "Russian-Hebrew  
Poet" hates Arabs because they're like black Jews.

Tell me, I don't understand literature,  
is this wit or something we should believe?

'I'll tell you you'll be tried for such chatter.

I'm not a writer. This is Tel Aviv.'

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Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) - *Virtual and Other Realities* (1997)

- 1 Despite his manacles, the wiry murderer
- 2 in the death cell broke a bottle of porter,
- 3 slashed his throat, but death was out of order---
- 4 blood-red Matthew was patched up by his jailer,
- 5 made half decent for the hanging, all the better for
- 6 white cap, white gloves, tied feet and hands, miner
- 7 with no dirt on him, Matthew Clydesdale, actor
- 8 to a massed milling of hard starers, leaper
- 9 out of this world, carted in coffin of fir
- 10 with his death in order, under halberds as was proper,
- 11 up the Saltmarket in a dreary November,
- 12 into the College, to the anatomy hall where
- 13 Matthew must act again. The professor-dissector
- 14 gowns himself in white, bows to the theatre
- 15 of buzzing tiers, introduces an experimenter.
- 16 A Glasgow Frankenstein is Doctor Ure.
- 17 The hanged man sits unbound in an armchair.
- 18 His dreadful face faces the handsome professor,
- 19 the avantgarde chemist, the galvanic battery. Air
- 20 enters his lungs, his tongue wags, eyes flutter,
- 21 limbs convulse, he stands, amazed, aware---
- 22 his death is not in order! In the uproar
- 23 shouts, faintings, shrieks, applause conspire
- 24 to let Professor Jeffrey lance the jugular
- 25 with theatrical flourish. At his third death, the collier
- 26 leaving the electric arms of his resurrector
- 27 slumps in the blade-cold arms of his dissector.
- 28 Clear the hall. Pity the executioner,
- 29 pity the murderer, pity the professor,
- 30 pity the doctor with his battery and his ardour.

## Acquisitions

Lavinia Greenlaw (1962) - *A World Where News Travelled Slowly* (1997)

Henry Ford boasted

there would be no Egyptian mummies in his museum.

*Everything we have is strictly American.*

Steam engines, cars and guns

in answer to the amateur anthropologist's

list of set questions:

*Is bleeding, scarifying or cupping practised?*

*Is marriage by capture, exchange or purchase?*



## Lifting the Lid

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

Lifting the lid on our  
uncertain longing  
for a god -

these ropes and pulleys  
are the liturgy  
of modern belief,

but no explanation of  
darkness can  
be found in the light -

when you touch your  
own hand in the mirror,  
what you feel is glass.

## Visit of the Egyptian Antiquities Department's Inventory Commission

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

Each item labelled and in its own place.  
The work (they had to admit) of a true  
Professional. Just one final check through  
Those storage boxes at the back. No trace  
Of anything improper: only a case  
From Fortnums, marked 'Best Claret'... Allah! a new  
Baby lifted into the room! A blue  
Sacred lotus blossom - the Sun God's face!

'I do not condemn you. It was a crime  
Of passion. You will be dealt no punishment  
By me - but by the Future. When the time  
To weigh your heart nears, should my head prevent  
The scales balancing, you may have to climb  
And be questioned by her correspondent.'

Gavin Ewart - *The Young Pobble's Guide to His Toes* (1985)

19 Colquhoun turns tae McBride wi' a fine disgust  
20 At the sight o' that distant an' reddenin' dust.  
21 'Mon, but it's horrible!' 'Aye, but 'twill pass!'  
22 An' they ply, baith, the gold, unremittin' wee glass!

To Haydn and Mozart

Clive Wilmer (1945) - *Of Earthly Paradise* (1992)

- 1 You were both endowed with flair and with, no doubt,
- 2 What is called genius; but I think of you
- 3 Bent over your claviers, two men at work,
- 4 Fending off discord with your fingertips.
- 5 At work you could stay unmoved by what you knew
- 6 Of exploitation or of penury,
- 7 Uncomprehending ignorance and pride,
- 8 Loss, disappointment, pain. You turned from these
- 9 To forms your labour could not warp, because
- 10 You heard in them the possibility
- 11 Of grace, which echoes order in the mind.

Winchester Diver

Hilary Davies (1954) - *The Shanghai Owner of the Bonsai Shop* (1991)

1 Twenty-pound boots to keep him  
2 Under the surface. Each morning  
3 A dresser to weigh this leaf  
4 Of bone down beneath the suspended  
5 Cathedral; twelve men to pay out  
6 The line and listen for the tug  
7 And flow of his heart.

8 He works in utter dark, letting  
9 The rivers in. They burst  
10 From gravel beds and set  
11 Logs that once were forests  
12 Dappling the banks adrift into  
13 His arms. Around him  
14 Whisper the dreams of the  
15 Casketed dead.

16 Pick, pick, pick with his hammer  
17 And greased, bare hands.  
18 His fingernails are black  
19 With the ark's foundations;  
20 She grinds and dances  
21 On her shifting rock;  
22 Wounds wide as hands  
23 Open her flesh.

24 Down here the world's still  
25 At its dead centre.  
26 Stacking and slashing of cement  
27 Turns the diver's ocean of  
28 Salt to stone.  
29 He'll beat out the fishes  
30 Of his mind, stops up his ears  
31 When tremors from the trench below

32 Burst their hearts. *Only*  
33 *Make this house safe, think of*  
34 *Nothing but the work in hand.*

35 And the queen and king are sailing  
36 Home from the windless sea of Marmora;  
37 Two owls that refuse escape are  
38 Grouted in. Now the scaffolding  
39 Rises into the free air away  
40 From nightmares of whales,  
41 Only children in violent reds  
42 And whites, crowds shouting:  
43 William Walker in his perfect  
44 Dark shores up God's kingdom  
45 On his back.

Unidentified Aliens, New Mexico, 1947

John Gohorry (1943) - *Talk into the Late Evening* (1992)

They found them a couple of miles off the disc-wreckage,  
still in their time-harnesses, but unbelievably aged;  
their fat, scaly tongues like the tongues of chameleons  
petrified by the desert heat and turned macaw perches,

and their eyestrings drawn out by desperate hummingbirds  
tangled around their white mouths like failed parachutes.  
Cursing the heat in their respirators they cut them free,  
and stowed them like war casualties in canvas body-bags

on the floor of the gunship. Heading for Walker Field  
and the Lieutenant's report to his General, Base H.Q,  
they were already naming them - Toadsucker, Silverskin,  
Big Mouth, Horny White Eye, recognising them as their own,

and recalling too how, as they pulled Horny White Eye up  
from the body heap, his hands were tight around Silverskin  
as if they'd been sitting side by side in the bucketseats  
at the movies, and he knew how the last reel would end.





## Opening

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

A cache of,  
aristocrats  
unearthed by the  
Antiquities Department  
watches Carter lift  
the crowbar  
(‘We’re going to have  
a concert!’  
winks Carnarvon)  
and break into  
the sealed  
burial chamber.

Two have already  
been in here  
unofficially once  
but disguised their  
entry and withdrawal  
with a pile of reeds  
and a Moses basket  
(‘left by the tomb-  
robbers in their  
haste... ’)  
and now  
at all costs  
they must pretend  
that they are seeing  
everything for  
the first time.  
(‘Carter’s going to to  
sing a song!’)

The alabaster lamp  
seems to writhe  
and croon, its limbs  
a triple lotus  
growing from a sacred pond  
like the legs and welcoming  
arms of a cabaret star  
that single you out

and usher you in  
and show you the circle  
which you must enter  
before you may open the shrine.

The spectators  
will the two  
protagonists  
to speak  
to elaborate...

but they stand,  
a momentary shudder  
of guilt shadowing  
the triumphant  
backdrop of gold and blue

and suddenly -  
not words, no words  
from this dumbstruck  
double-act

but a whisper  
from the black wings  
from a small lamp  
with a wick  
and a mud base:

*It is I  
who hinder the sand  
from choking  
the secret chamber*

*I am for  
the protection  
of the deceased*

A Pocket Collection

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

I

Touch these bright bead  
sandals and their pattern  
rolls for ever out of reach.

II

Grasshopper that hopped  
from tomb to top pocket  
to New York Art Dealer.

III

The King's Wishing Cup, found  
to be left in peace.  
too late for him to wish

## Entertaining Caesar

Fergus Chadwick – *A Shape in the Net* (1993)

(Puteoli: 19th December 45 B.C.)

Not liking to refuse his plan  
that we should meet again  
lest he read my absence as fear,  
or 'resistance to the trend  
of events', I let him come.

Scholars' respect apart, our friendship  
- from times past - I'd never get back  
into it, I thought,  
any more than a tight robe, but,  
his presence thawed the frost

Like the sun on the roofs that morning,  
and despite the guards that Cassius  
Barba lent me - making the grounds  
look like the dictator's  
camp - all was friendly.

Still, it was my feeling he came  
to test me: about new  
vacillations; old decisions;  
prompted perhaps by henchmen  
who feared my veto on them...

Or simply from curiosity:  
sure in my own mind his private  
opinion belittled my past  
handling of power and  
discounted my 'threat' now.

Threat? - We had three rooms  
full of dining retainers and slaves.  
Had it not been a slight  
to friendship, you could say we leant  
over backwards to make him God.

He seemed meaner than before:  
one knew he could obligate

bullies like Antony.  
His reserve -we discussed only  
literary things-was awesome.

For he couldn't quite hide the fact  
- despite his walk on the shore, his  
bath, his emetic pills -  
that he had billeted himself on  
me, a friend of Rome,

As if to show his marked contempt  
for the freedom he had  
ended with gifts, of conquests  
arming his greater Empire to crush  
those who would kill him.

Arming against Rome,  
he had need of guards: for it was  
by the stink of power  
that the Liberators found him  
when the people had no champion.

I was relieved to see him go,  
for I had dined with a dead man.

(Cicero himself was murdered one year and nine months later, under proscription by the party of Antony and Octavian.)

## For the First Dog in Space

Lavinia Greenlaw (1962) - *Night Photograph* (1993)

You're being sent up in Sputnik 2,  
a kind of octopus with rigor mortis.  
Ground control have sworn allegiance  
to gravity and the laws of motion;  
they sleep without dreams,  
safe in the knowledge  
that a Russian mongrel bitch  
can be blasted through the exosphere  
at seven miles a second,  
but can never stray far from home.  
You will have no companion,  
no buttons to press, just six days' air.  
Laika, do not let yourself be fooled  
by the absolute stillness  
that comes only with not knowing  
how fast you are going. As you fall  
in orbit around the earth, remember  
your language. Listen to star dust.  
Trust your fear.

## The Defenestration of Hillsborough

Tom Paulin – *Fivemiletown* (1987)

1 Here we are on a window ledge  
2 with the idea of race.

3 All our victories  
4 were defeats really

5 and the tea chests in that room  
6 aren't packed with books.

7 The door's locked on us  
8 so we begin again

9 with cack on the sill  
10 and *The Book of Analogies*.

11 It falls open at a map  
12 of the small nations of Europe,

13 it has a Lutheran engraving  
14 of Woodrow Wilson's homestead

15 in a cloon above Strabane,  
16 and it tells you Tomás??? Masaryk

17 was a locksmith's apprentice.  
18 This means we have a choice:

19 either to jump or get pushed.

Articulating Hungary  
(1956-1989)

Paul Hyland (1947) - *Kicking Sawdust* (1995)

Imre Nagy is excavated  
watched by his daughter and granddaughter  
bone by bone from the unmarked grave  
where he was thrown face-down.

Bone by bone: pelvis, scapula, jaw,  
skull like mahogany, tibia and fibula  
like twigs still rooted in boots,  
laced boots that trod the air.

Elsewhere a woman disinters  
a shirt from her drawer;  
says she's washed it, washed it  
but stains stay where the bullet  
tore from her husband's chest,  
a family secret until now.

Two hundred thousand witness  
Nagy's funeral, his skeleton assembled  
face-up in a pristine casket,  
a revolution resurrected.

The woman holds out the shirt:  
a banner, a flag kept folded  
for the day she would be free  
to fly it, heavy words  
tearing out of her mouth faster  
and faster, lighter and lighter.

*Imre Nagy*: installed in government by USSR, premier 1953-55 and in 1956 uprising,  
seized by Russian troops and hung in 1958, reburied 1989.



Canteen Song

*Preston Station Buffet, 4 a.m., July 1916*

Phoebe Hesketh (1909-2005) - *A Box of Silver Birch* (1997)

- 1 Green flag and whistle
- 2 Shrill through clouding steam
- 3 As the panting train,
- 4 Loaded with cheering tommys,
- 5 Jerks into life.
  
- 6 *Living and dead*
- 7 *Living and dead*
- 8 *The living are gone*
- 9 *To add to the dead.*
  
- 10 In the canteen
- 11 Plump ladies in blue overalls
- 12 Turn away, rolling up their sleeves
- 13 To empty the urns, clattering cups and spoons
- 14 Louder than thoughts.
  
- 15 Yet some are weeping,
- 16 Some are yawning,
- 17 None are greeting this midsummer morning
- 18 With more than flickering hope.
  
- 19 *Living and dead*
- 20 *The living are gone*
- 21 *To add to the dead.*
  
- 22 Again the signal falls
- 23 To greet the train blowing sparks and steam
- 24 As it screams to a stop.
  
- 25 *Two cheers for the living*
- 26 *Though all are crippled*
- 27 *And many already half dead.*

28 Here come the Red Cross,  
29 The stretcher-bearers  
30 And valiant V.A.D.s,  
31 Give a thought to the widows  
32 And children, losers  
33 And bearers as much as these.

34 *So the living return*  
35 *In halting hundreds*  
36 *Leaving the thousands dead.*

Reforma Agraria

Ian Duhig (1954) - *The Bradford Count* (1991)

In 1936,  
Falange or Carlist priests  
showed wounded men,  
republicans,  
rojo-separatistas,  
an extreme unction,  
a cristazito limpio,  
a blow with the crucifix  
between the eyes,  
a blessed paseo,  
the light oil of the gun  
like watchmaker's oil, or sunflower oil,  
ran from the Lugers,  
ran from Berettas down into the eyes  
of wounded land-leaguers,  
who closed them knowing  
even then they'd won  
two square metres,  
room for the red rose tree.

At Swarkestone

U. A. Fanthorpe – *Safe as Houses* (1995)

It is often said that Bonnie Prince Charlie got as far as Derby in his invasion of 1745. In fact, he reached Swarkestone, some nine miles further south.

J.G. Collingwood, *The River Trent*

He turned back here. Anyone would. After  
The long romantic journey from the North  
To be faced with this. A *so what?* sort of place,  
A place that, like a mirror, makes you see.

A scrubby ridge, impassive river, and beyond,  
The flats of Middle England. History waited  
To absorb him. Parliaments, dynasties, empires  
Lay beyond these turnip fields. Not what he wanted.

He could have done it. The German Royals  
Had packed their bags, there was a run  
On the Bank of England, London stood open as jelly.  
Nobody could have stopped him. This place did,

And the hurricane that blew his cause from Moidart  
In a bluster of kilts and claymores and bright red hair  
Faded at Swarkestone as they turned their backs,  
Withdrawing into battle, slaughter, song.

Earthquake, Osaka 1995

Tobias Hill (1970) - *Midnight in the City of Clocks* (1996)

She leans the door against a wall.  
Takes off her shoes. On the freezer is a bottle  
of *Plum Orchard Fine Rice Wine*. In the freezer  
is the smell of rice fused to clinker in a pot.  
Next to the freezer is a hole.  
Through it she can see the street:

a boy in shorts is selling cans of Coke.  
A boy in jeans is drinking head-down to a puddle.  
Between sirens, an old woman  
is catching locusts with her hands  
in an allotment of tea-green rice.

She wants to help them but the television  
has been broken and her arm  
hurts to the bone. She pours rice wine  
into her mouth, up to the hard brim of her teeth.

It tastes of sour milk.  
She fills a cup until meniscus  
shivers like clockwork at the brink.



## The Gas-Mask

John Levett (1950) - *Their Perfect Lives* (1994)

Its foetid tubes outlasted usefulness,  
War issue circa 1939.  
She let me put it on. No one would guess  
The skull that filled the rubber snout was mine.  
My voice, sucked down into the past decade  
Through pipes and perished mouldings, sounded wrong,  
Too hollow, other-worldly, too betrayed;  
The noise I'd make if I had not been born.  
The eyepieces were yellow, pickled cracks  
Zigzagged into a musty nasal cave,  
A shelter from the senseless dawn attacks  
Of guilt and fear if I dared misbehave.  
Anonymous I'd prowl the scullery,  
Visit every room, patrol the stairs,  
Sealed off from mustard-gas and Zyklon-B,  
Dive-bombing beds, napalming rocking chairs.  
The mirror in the hallway trapped my shape,  
Half a face, a trunk, two rolling eyes,  
The blind stare of some technocratic ape  
At high-octane liana in the skies.  
It grew too hot. My head stewed in my breath,  
A sapping, unhygienic foetal bath;  
I fought myself and died rehearsing death  
Still strapped inside a face that couldn't laugh.  
There comes a time when all pretending stops,  
The door is opened, out you go to play,  
You grab your mask, your bag of acid drops,  
Then run and duck towards the grainy day.

## The Wall (*Obligatory*)

Ken Smith (1938-2003) - *The Heart, the Border* (1990)

There is the one side and the other,  
and between there is the wall. Each side  
has its monuments, its flags, its currency,  
its bulletholes, its notions of the other.

Over here we say *the beaten in the lobby*  
*of the crestfallen*. Some days we pity them.  
Over there they watch us through binoculars.  
Over there they call us fascists.

There, here is *over there*, and their maps  
of where we are are coloured white,  
as ours are of them. No one  
over there can fall in love over here.

Here the street ends and there's wall,  
and on the other side the same street:  
tramtracks, kerbstones, streetlights  
coming on, pedestrians about their business.

I  
They do not wave or look back. It is  
as if we were each others' ghosts. Either side  
history comes with a wall round it.  
We are each other's terra incognita.

Somewhere there's a piano playing boogie,  
and on this side a late night argument  
strung out with booze and bamboozle  
till the word gets lost in the many

qualifications of itself, and it all ends  
in tears. Over there the long silence  
broken by dogs at each change of shift,  
some border guard on his two-stroke.

And everywhere it seems a night bird  
fills the dark with long pulses of his song.  
He doesn't care to be one side or the other.  
His song is all of him.



I understand where this late night music  
of a sad piano is coming from.  
I understand where that long  
leashed baying of manhounds is coming from.

But I don't understand where the nightingale  
in these long pulls of music through himself  
and the buildings and the trees  
or from which side of anywhere he is singing.

1944

Sylvia Kantaris (1936) – *Dirty Washing* (1989)

When we heard that a fighter-plane had crashed  
in Ash Wood we could hardly wait till school was out.  
'Little jackals,' one of the spectators called us.  
We guessed a jackal was a kind of werewolf  
and bared our baby-teeth to try it out.  
The area was cordoned off but we crept close  
behind a wall and squinted through a crack,  
and Peter said he saw a bloody finger.  
John said he saw brains and I swore blind  
I saw a blue eye staring through the wreckage.  
Janet saw a leg in a flying-boot.

Each Saturday for weeks we grubbed  
for any scraps of flesh the Home Guard  
might have overlooked amongst the last  
remains of rusting metal - and shrieked  
each time we spied a clump of fungus  
or clots and streaks of elderberry blood  
until the thrill palled. We got bored with death.

After that, Saturday was pictures day,  
as usual, at the village hut. We yawned  
through censored newsreels, crunching Victory Vs,  
and spurred our front bench through the tomahawks,  
spitting bullets loudly with our fingers,  
bravely plucking arrows from our guts.  
But when they showed a horror film they wouldn't  
let us in. We were too young to be exposed  
to close-ups of the war or Frankenstein,  
except in bits and pieces, one eye at a time  
glued to rust-hole in the corrugated iron.

Royal Family Doulton

Kathleen Jamie (1962) - *The Queen of Sheba* (1995)

My ladies of the dark oak dresser  
I reached for you above the pewter  
teapots ribbed like cockles, snaps  
taken with the first family Kodak  
six months ago when we were wee.

Figurines in mufflers, *Top o' the hill*,  
*Katherine*, ermine, *Demure's* eyes  
lowered in a poke bonnet; I remember  
your petticoats, flower baskets,  
the delicacy of gloves.

Not my Nana scrubbing floors, her fine mantle  
a gas-light's; the shared lavvy, my hand  
in her rough fist past the blacked-out  
stair-head window no one bothered  
to scrape clean, to welcome a dull sun

twenty years since the bombs.  
The Doultons' heart-shaped faces  
gazed at summer Downs, sparkly ballrooms.  
Seized in coy pirouettes, little victims  
of enchantment, the tenement was condemned.

Handed down. On the mattresses  
of my various floors I saw you trip  
along lanes, hold tiny parasols against  
the glare of naked bulbs, peek behind  
fans in a house

where shaven-haired women  
slept in the same bed,  
and Jim greased guns for burial  
in a revolutionary field.  
One day I smothered them

in bubble-wrap, like a mother

I read of who smothered her kids  
for fear of the Bomb,  
took them back to the safety  
of my parents' built-in wardrobe,

in case they got smashed,  
little arms and bonnets, parasols  
and scattered baskets. One day, I said  
I'll have a calm house, a home  
suitable for idols; but it hasn't happened yet.

Oboth

Gillian Allnutt (1949) – *Blackthorn* (1994)

Utha was my wife. She howled as I left her.  
She flung herself to the floor of the hut.  
Packed earth it was and ashes.  
I saw two little ridges of earth where she'd  
dug her wooden boots in. Writhed and howled, she did.  
No one was there, though they are with her now.  
They are combing her hair down her back.

I am sad I had to leave my boots behind.  
They'd cut them from me months before I left  
because I could no longer walk but lay on the shelf  
of the bed cut into the white wall by the stove.  
I would not let my split boots out of my sight.  
They sat side by side on the stool  
and Utha did not sit on it.

I did not know my feet. I think they were white  
but I felt nothing. And they did not know themselves.  
Utha wrapped them in brown cloth.  
She said it was an old chemise.  
What is chemise? Chemise came with her  
from the small town where she'd been a girl.  
Chemise was before I knew her.

Forest was what we knew together. What was ours.  
Edge of forest. That at our backs and before us  
taiga, scrub, the coarse yellow flowers.  
Carts coming over the rutted plain.  
Carts that stumbled, stayed one night  
then left at dawn loaded with logs of pine.  
That was in summer. The short light months.

In winter, snow. Moon light of snow my boots loved.  
How they let themselves in for it and were glad.  
They shaped themselves to snow and me,  
the hard ground that they knew.

Irith had to split them from me  
with his heart-axe. Little axe  
he had, tucked in his belt.

We'd sawn together and our lives were long.  
It is quite hard to explain how, with each pine,  
we'd come to it and known.  
The first and last and inner ring.  
How Irith, axe in hand, had quickly cut the tree  
and how, because he was a kind man,  
Irith came to cut my boots from me that day.

The Sentries' Night-Watch  
George Charlton (1950) – *City of Dogs* (1994)

(*West Walls, Newcastle, 1644*)

This evening, as we mount the walls,  
The housewife, humming a lullaby,  
Shakes bedbugs from an eiderdown  
Beneath tawny Flemish pantiles:  
A lock of loose hair describes her cheek  
As thinner than it was in spring.

Atop the castle keep, the flag  
That's flown there all along  
Is luminous red in the lowering sun:  
The captain gives his lass a kiss  
Below the steps, his cuirass creaks  
In the moistening air of evening coming on.

Our armpits reek: we watch across  
The siege-scape's rubble suburbs,  
Its wreckage of coalpits and glasshouses,  
The vacant wharfs and merchant-adventurers'  
Chambers that rubbery bats rebound off,  
To the tree-line of the Scottish wood.

We watch as martins curtly snip through air  
To nests like cannonballs beneath the eaves  
Of villages we come from - villages  
Lost to us, for all the ways are barred,  
Though we know their scents of resin and flowers  
And their names: Dissington, Dalton, Stamfordham.

Therefore, before we go, we'll leave  
Such things we have no further use of –  
Our clay-pipe bowls, their broken stems,  
The cold scorch of the brazier's fire,  
Our long-awaited back-pay in small change:  
You can make of them what you like.

French Connection  
Stewart Conn (1936) – *In the Blood* (1995)

*(in celebration of the Auld Alliance, 1295-1995)*

What amalgam of nationhood and sentimentality  
induces in us Scots such lachrymosity?

When in the bluster and skite of Hogmanay,  
smooth as an oyster in stout, the old year slips away;

or bagpipes skirling and glengarries doffed,  
the haggis's reeking entrails are raised aloft.

Grown men are known to weep in caravanseraï  
by yon Bonnie Banks, or crossing the sea to Skye;

while comics (Glesca and other) employ their wiles  
to reduce us to crumpled Kleenex, in the aisles.

A more solemn lump comes to the throat at losses  
on foreign fields, those rows of receding crosses;

or posthumously honouring men of girth  
driven by inner demons to the ends of the earth

on feet of clay: remote anniversaries  
an enticing diversion from today's injustices.

Given that accident of birth and blood decree  
which flag has first call on our loyalty

have these seven centuries of Auld Alliance  
borne fruit, or merely fuelled defiance

of the common enemy hopped in imperial power,  
its emblems the village green, the Bloody Tower;

alternate bombast and disparagement  
occupying the vacuum of self-government?

Somehow we manage to survive such rancour



(English paradoxically, our *lingua franca*);

increasingly employing on sporting occasions  
the vocabulary of war, to stoke our passions:

viz football's lunacy - or the true romance  
of Big Gavin's glorious try at Pare des Princes,

manly metaphor for entente between Nations,  
or separatist's excuse for more libations.

Words to a rousing tune can cause a riot,  
albeit so spurious the head won't buy it.

Though often riven by ambivalence  
the heart knows no dilemma in this instance:

*O Flower of Scotland* quickly mists my gaze,  
but my pulse races to the *Marseillaise*.

## SIENA IN SIXTY-EIGHT

Charles Tomlinson (1927) - *The Door in the Wall* (1992)

The town band, swaying dreamily on its feet,  
Under the portraits of Gramsci and Ho  
Play 'Selections from *Norma*', and the moon,  
Casta diva, mounts up to show  
How high the sky is over harvested Tuscany,  
Over this communist conviviality within the wall  
Of a fortress that defends nothing at all.

History turns to statues, to fancy dress  
And the stylishness of Guevara in his bonnet. Here,  
Red-bloused, forgetful sales girls  
For the revolution, flirt with the males  
At a bookstore under an awning of red:  
Lenin, Che, Debray and Mao-  
The unbought titles, pristinely serried.

'Realism and sobriety' one might write of the art show:  
In *No to Repression*, a procession of women  
With raised fists, shouts No, No, No.  
And between *American Bombers* and *Black Boy Cleaning Shoes*  
Somebody, unteachably out of step,  
Has gouged intently into paint  
The stigmata of St Francis in *Miracle of the Saint*.

Consciences drowse this summer night  
Warmed by the after-glow. Fragrance of cooking  
Weighs on the sense already fed by it,  
The wild boar turning and turning on its spit;  
And the air too greasily replete to lift the red flag,  
The morning headlines grow fainter in the dusk:  
'Where is Dubcek?' 'Tanks on the streets of Prague.'

## THE CENTURY PLANT

Jamie McKendrick (1955) - *The Marble Fly* (1997)

1 A century after its introduction  
2 to Oxford's Botanical Gardens greenhouse,  
3 on the site of the medieval Jewish cemetery,  
4 the agave has taken a leap of faith  
5 it won't survive, and begun to blaze  
6 with sulphurous buds. It's not clear whether  
7 global or more local warming lit the fuse  
8 in the patient rootstock and sent one limb  
9 rocketing upward so its top  
10 can look down even on the banana tree  
11 besides the other transplants. The palm-line  
12 is said to move a metre north each year  
13 ---these days more like a kilometre---  
14 but either way the agave's too far ahead  
15 to be caught up with, despite the hundred years  
16 of waiting---now two, at the most three weeks  
17 of prodigal flowering and the whole thing ends.

18 In 1850 in Seville,  
19 while his contemporaries photographed  
20 rotting barges on the Guadalquivir  
21 or farm labourers in sheepskin waistcoats  
22 or Gypsy women in the tobacco factory,  
23 Vicomte J. de Vigier,  
24 turned his back on the folkloric and his lens  
25 on the common-or-garden naturalized exotics  
26 like palm trees and bamboo. His masterpiece,  
27 *Etude d'aloès*, shows this tumid  
28 dusty plant on a nondescript roadside.  
29 It holds grimly on to its patch of nowhere  
30 and drinks and drinks the silver nitrate light  
31 as though there were no belonging anywhere  
32 but there and then, and nothing sublime

33 except that stretch of dirt, that broken wall  
34 and the rays of a faded nineteenth-century sun.

The Lists of Coventry

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

Then, it was just a means of arbitration,  
Ordeal by mass entertainment: two knights,  
Like glittering exhibition cases, armed,

Escutcheoned, and embroidered, their chased  
Lances quivering at the opposite ends  
Of a concourse, waiting for the first trumpet

To send painted Swan and Antelope charging  
Down on painted Mulberry Tree and Lion;  
Or a more urgent trumpet - like the voice

Of a ten-year-old trying to make himself  
Heard above his advisers, above the mob  
Writhing around Wat Tyler's corpse - to cry out

'Let me be your leader!', and in a  
Kingfisher flash of crimson and green-blue  
Velvet, prevent the bloodshed. A lover

Of spectacle, and the colourful arts  
Of peace, King Richard stands up to flourish  
Words in illuminated filigree

From a goat-hide scroll... and we recollect  
That Pathe shot of Chamberlain after Munich;  
Or a dark-suited, bespectacled John Nott

Stumbling through the lists of British losses.

George Müller

Jack Clemo (1916-1994) - *The Cured Arno* (1995)

He would have shocked Devon anyway,  
That madcap turned pietist,  
God-tracked from his native Saxony.  
Before he yielded, reached the Teign  
And Keats's shade, there was a kinship  
Between wafted poet and plodding, prose-burdened student

Wand-waving, word-weaving, the pagan spell  
Fierce under delicate fancies - these, for Keats,  
Bred torment through the inspirer's caution or scorn;  
And dry husks, abstract in divinity courses,  
Could not guard virtue when thick Prussian blood  
Relit carnality near inns and brothels.

Demure, perplexed, the church-folk around Teignmouth  
Had stared at Keats a few years earlier,  
But Muller prompted a friendlier awe.  
This quirky penitent, refusing  
Schedule and salary, had captured Shaldon  
With a childlike love, a seer's prophetic eye  
And a slow tongue groping for English.

He had once been jailed for petty crime  
And dead drunk as often as Keats,  
Arrogant at Halle and, flushed at cards,  
drawn into brute-heat by a haggling kiss.

The London poet seemed a sick moth, fluttering  
To his grave in Rome and casting on the Teign,  
The Exe, the Shaldon cottages,  
The venom of a starved, orphaned dream.

Young Muller soon dreamed of orphans,  
Spurred by his Exeter wife, pregnant in Bristol,  
And a century of humdrum philanthropy,  
Haggling humanism, was struck by a seer's gamble,  
Herding his multitudes of children  
Outside the well-planned tracks of survival,  
In a Bible-fenced corral of stubborn prayer.

The saints' way of emptiness, blind trust in God  
Its vindication is historic:  
It bred no melancholy art.

George Müller, a lecherous German student before his conversion, became the most remarkable Christian philanthropist in Victorian England. He built and maintained five orphanages at Ashley Down, near Bristol, relying entirely on faith and prayer, never advertising or appealing for funds.

A Ballad for Apothecaries

Anne Stevenson (1933) - *Granny Scarecrow* (2000)

Being a Poem to Honour the Memory of  
Nicholas Culpeper, Gent.

Puritan, Apothecary, Herbalist, Astologer

Who in the year of our Lord 1649

Did publish *A PHYSICAL DIRECTORY*

A translation from the Latin of the London Dispensatory  
made by the College of Physicians

'Being that Book by which all Apothecaries are strictly  
commanded to make all their Physicke.'

- 1 In sixteen-hundred-and-sixteen
- 2 (The year Will Shakespeare died),
- 3 Earth made a pact with a curious star,
- 4 And a newborn baby cried.
  
- 5 Queen Bess's bright spring was over,
- 6 James Stuart frowned from the throne;
- 7 A more turbulent, seditious people
- 8 England had never known.
  
- 9 Now, Nick was a winsome baby,
- 10 And Nick was a lively lad,
- 11 So they gowned him and sent him to Cambridge
- 12 Where he went, said the priests, to the bad.
  
- 13 For though he excelled in Latin
- 14 And could rattle the Gospels in Greek,
- 15 He thought to himself, there's more to be said
- 16 Than the ancients knew how to speak.
  
- 17 He was led to alchemical studies
- 18 Through a deep Paracelsian text.



19 He took up the art of astrology first,  
20 And the science of botany next.

21 To the theories of Galen he listened,  
22 And to those of Hippocrates, too,  
23 But he said to himself, there's more to be done  
24 Than the ancients knew how to do.

25 For though Dr Tradition's a rich man,  
26 He charges a rich man's fee.  
27 Dr Reason and Dr Experience  
28 Are my guides in philosophy.

29 The College of Learned Physicians  
30 Prescribes for the ruling class:  
31 Physick for the ills of the great, they sneer,  
32 Won't do for the vulgar mass.

33 But I say the heart of a beggar  
34 Is as true as the heart of a king,  
35 And the English blood in our English veins  
36 Is of equal valuing.

37 Poor Nick fell in love with an heiress,  
38 But en route to their desperate tryst,  
39 The lady was struck down by lightning  
40 Before they'd embraced or kissed.

41 So our hero consulted the Heavens  
42 Where he saw he was fated to be  
43 A friend to the sick and the humble  
44 But the Great World's enemy.

45 Nick packed up his books in Cambridge  
46 And came down without a degree  
47 To inspirit Red Lion Street, Spitalfields,  
48 With his fiery humanity.

49 As a reckless, unlicensed physician,  
50 He was moved to disseminate

51 Cures for the ills of the body  
52 With cures for the ills of the state.

53 Who knows what horrors would have happened  
54 To Nicholas Culpeper, Gent.,  
55 If the king hadn't driven his kingdom  
56 Into war with Parliament.

57 In the ranks of the New Model Army  
58 Nick fought with the medical men,  
59 Till a Royalist bullet at Newbury  
60 Shot him back to his thundering pen.

61 'Scholars are the people's jailors,  
62 And Latin's their jail,' he roared,  
63 'Our fates are in thrall to knowledge;  
64 Vile men would have knowledge obscured!'

65 When they toppled King Charles's head off  
66 Nick Culpeper cried, 'Amen!'  
67 It's well that he died before the day  
68 They stuck it on again.

69 Still, English tongues won their freedom  
70 In those turbulent years set apart;  
71 And the wise, they cherish Nick's courage  
72 While they cheer his compassionate heart.

73 So whenever you stop in a chemist's  
74 For an aspirin or salve for a sore,  
75 Give a thought to Nicholas Culpeper  
76 Who dispensed to the London poor.

77 For cures for the ills of the body  
78 Are cures for the ills of the mind;  
79 And a welfare state is a sick state  
80 When the dumb are led by the blind.

## CROYLAND

### A Hermit's Journal

Stuart Henson – *Ember Music* (1994)

(for Kevin Crossley-Holland)

In the seventh century, Croyland (now Crowland, Lincolnshire) was an uninhabited island deep in the inhospitable and undrained fenlands to the north east of Peterborough. St Guthlac was a Mercian warrior before his conversion to Christianity. He entered the monastery at Repton, and after two years was given permission to depart and seek out a hermitage.

The sequence uses details from Felix's Latin *Life of St Guthlac* (edited & translated by Bertram Colgrave, Cambridge University Press, 1956). The versions from the Guthlac poems in the Exeter Book are based on S.A.J. Bradley's prose translations (*Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, Dent 1982).

1.

The boatman dips his oar  
in the sticky waters;  
the weed swirls in his wake  
and the ripples close.  
It begins now,  
my apprenticeship to solitude  
in this no man's land  
of the soil and skies,  
where the sun rises and sinks  
in marches of fen on every hand.  
The four horizons  
gather their winds to hurl  
the seasons across this place:  
a wilderness,  
an emptiness, a space  
to meet God on his own terms.  
I am bound now to search  
my path into grace  
between these alder groves  
these ambiguous shades  
with their water-mint  
and their poisonous bittersweet.  
I am bound  
to make it my own,  
this trackless island,  
sunken in chaos.  
My acre of savage Eden  
voided of men.

2.

Today, an inventory, of beasts:

freshwater fishes, eels, the heron's feeding;  
the small amphibians - frogs, toads, newts.

Among the rushes, coot, warblers, grebe  
of both kinds; lithe worms; fenny snakes.

When the sun is out, butterflies,  
beetles, bugs in abundance.

One common kestrel hangs on its cliff of air  
where the grasses beach themselves in waves.

Larvae, thin nymphs with telescopic legs.  
The mask of the gauzy dragonfly.

By dusk, moths, bats, glow-worms...

No demons. So far.

3.

Who dug my cell?

Thieves.

Where did they sweat?

Down in the ark of a grave.

What were they seeking?

Gold, crystal, garnets and ivory.

What did they find?

Bones in the black soil,  
worms, a flask, ivory skulls.

How did they go?

Furtive, fearful, charged  
with all ill.

Why did they so -  
scraping my cell  
with their iron crows,  
their hands;  
guilty, unknowing?

Working God's will.

4.

Easy enough to disregard the gloss of mirrors:  
sickness and hollow age and death.

Too long with these coarse, sore hides on my bones,  
today in the lake I caught my own face, shrunk, thinner.

A scrape of barley-bread when the sun's set;  
the taste-sense dull, like silt in my bowl.

My head has become a shell of doubt. At night  
the dread of the ravening dark, the last threshold.

Time past, too long in lighted rooms, in brazen cups,  
drunken and draining desire's lees for the drug lust.

Too many beds with neither then; these lips  
stained: blood; kisses; a woman's promises.

Enough! As if it were not enough to have strewn  
men out of their homes, set torches at their thatch.

A third of all their pathetic wealth I gave them back,  
proud, with that condescending charity.

Each time I look, the glass of my life shows ill.  
This cell's not tight enough to squeeze me out of hell.

This suffering itself is another kind of vanity.

5.

How frail the flesh,  
the body's bone thermometer,  
the thin capillaries  
of fingertips and toes  
that still record  
night's rigor mortis setting in  
and the slow thaw by day.  
And seasons too -the spirit  
flaking out of its almost-death  
with the greening earth,  
with the fledgling leaves  
close-budded in their shells.

April. My face pulls  
to the southern sky  
for hints of warmth  
and the looked-for time  
when the swallows come  
like a promise reaffirmed.  
I slept today  
at my open door,  
and I dreamt my arms, my knees  
my breast aflame with wings.

To wake  
and to lift the small birds up  
to their place in the eaves!

To nest the storm-blown  
pulse of their life  
in my hands!



6.

A visitor. A thin young monk  
who is much possessed by writing.

Truths, no doubt, of the deepest kind.

Each day between prayers  
he sits for an hour  
at his sloping desk  
with furrowed brow.

No doubt he is sowing thought  
in his fertile mind.

Alas, as we knelt today in the oratory  
a pair of mad black jackdaws  
in at the window  
stole up his parchment, flapped it out,  
and vanished it to the depths of the mere.

Dark moods! Despair! His text lost!

But the boat is there and I send him off  
in the maze of mysterious creeks  
to where he may find  
the reeds bent with his paper's weight,  
and not one word of his wisdom smudged.

An act of fortune, or High Design?  
Who can tell?  
By God's grace his manuscript  
is retrieved from the waters' clutch.

It would seem, then, that he writes well.

7.

Last night, a fever, and then the demons came,  
as I knew they would.

But to go to the lip of hell and back-  
my soul sickens within me still.

It began with the cracks in the floor  
and the wall where they slided in,  
their bodies yellow and soft as phlegm,  
and the stench choking the air of the room;  
each one with its own foul grin, its slobbered beard,  
its skull like the bulbous head of a cretin.

Their knees and their elbows twisted out;  
even their bowels were visible  
through the slack transparent-ochre skin.  
They came with the stink of sin on their breath,  
with obscene screams, like the shrieking of calves  
in an abattoir.

Then they began their tortures.  
I sang: 'The Lord is at my right hand...'  
They drove thorns in my finger-ends,  
dragged brambles across the tender zones  
of my limbs till I cried aloud.  
They thrust my face down in the mere  
till my breath burst and I knew I drowned;  
they cried: 'Guthlac, leave this place!'  
I replied once again:  
'The Lord, The Lord is at my right hand.'  
They scourged me with cords  
knotted with iron butterflies;  
they brought machines  
from the forge of their sulphur-den  
to try me until I swooned into death.

In that dream, the skies were alive  
with the buzz of wings. I was borne aloft  
on the back of a cloud of their grim kind,  
and the black wind, like a locust-storm  
transported me north and set me down  
on the rim of a great volcano  
surging with flame. And it rained there,

in the fire-sea, with bolts of frozen hail.

As I watched, the host of the devil-kind  
began to wail: 'O Guthlac, we can cast you in  
where the heat of your lusts and your manifold sins  
will consume your flesh like wax on the wick  
of your bones. Behold, the vents of Erebus,  
the burning stones, the boiling Styx,  
and the molten gulfs of Acheron!'  
I cried in reply: 'Woe unto you, you seed of Cain.  
You are no more than dust and ash of a fevered dream.  
I am ready. So cast me in if you can!'

And with that the fever began to turn:  
I felt in my veins a white calm,  
like a drug that salves and dissolves pain,  
and my mind was filled with radiance-  
the invisible face of the saint whom I loved  
and to whom I prayed each night of my fast,  
Bartholomew, with his seraph-train, who spoke  
one word that drove the crawling demons home.

From that moment on, I sank toward dawn  
when the sun with its simple warmth  
came touching the walls of my room.

8.

(from Guthlac A)

*At once when Bartholomew spoke the God-word,  
then Guthlac's spirit swelled in bliss.  
All the submissive horde of the Satan-kind  
cringed to obey the behest of the saint.  
Thus blessed with beneficence, Guthlac began his journey  
back to the hallowed-spot thankfully trusting Grace.  
Gently, in God-fear, they gathered him up,  
anxious for his comfort, and careful to keep him safe.  
Home to the holy-place they bore him in triumph,  
where the host of birds chorused the wise-man's return  
in loud song, as if their voices would burst.  
For often the holy sage would hold out food for them  
when, hungry, they fluttered about his hands,  
fearless and greedy, glad of such aid.  
In this way, the gentle soul had withdrawn from the world,  
preferring the quiet-counsel and peace of the woods,  
delighting instead in the wild-creatures' companionship.  
The cell where he struggled was newly sanctified.  
Around about, the landscape broke forth in blossom;  
the cuckoo spoke with her two notes of spring.  
Renewed in resolution, Guthlac could rest in his dwelling-place,  
in the green, God-guarded ground of his cell,  
where divine strength had driven the devils off.  
What purer desire distilled from man's love than this?  
Is there any remembered among our fathers,  
or such we have known since then ourselves?*

9.

A great white owl  
with quilted wings like an angel  
has made its residence  
in the trusses that span my roof.  
The brush of its comings and goings  
has shadowed my sleep.  
When I pray in my cell I always keep  
the south door ajar:  
the blackbirds, a robin, a coot  
will come in and potter  
about my feet while I'm still.  
The fish, too, will attend my call:  
I speak when I go to cast them bread;  
then I wait to watch the lake-top boil.

But a price is paid for such  
gifts of God; such knowledge  
cuts like a two-edged knife.  
There are days, more frequently now,  
when the strangers arrive  
at the landing-place  
and the signal rings,  
and with slow heart I must go  
to answer their visiting.

There are those who journey from monasteries  
with their doubts, their curiosity,  
who will sit at meat with me  
and will judge in their secret hearts  
what they see of this old eccentric  
who lives out his life in a nest  
of timbers lost in the fen.  
Again, there are those who are sick  
in body or limb who come brave  
in the hope that my fasting, my prayers  
and my remedies will do more  
than all their physicians can.

Today, a young man whose madness  
the doctors cannot mend.  
There is nothing left to defend his soul  
from eternal fires but my faith  
and our actions of penitence.  
We must go, once again,  
to the oratory, to the font,  
to the edge of a black abyss  
more profound than despair;  
and there I must fight three days  
or more till the devil breaks.

Each time I am certain,  
yet racked with doubt:  
I must pull my miracle out  
like a conjurer with a great  
infallible trick: my devout hands  
must take his head, and my words  
must banish the beast in his brow  
with a God-sweet breath.

His parents will pay the dues of faith.  
They may build a church.  
Most probably they will broadcast  
my name with all favoured speech.  
Alas! I have not gone seeking such fame;  
but to follow in patient ways  
the paths to those truths  
that fall with the hush of an owl's wings,  
those wisdoms that gather in solitude  
like the birds at my feet.

10.

(from Guthlac B)

*Often on frost-bound days, forced in by hunger,  
the shy bird-flocks flew to feed from his hand  
and afterwards remained among the reed-beds,  
repaying their sustenance sweetly with song.  
And strangers too, the sick, the sorrowful in mind,  
would call at his cell for counsel and God's help.  
Not one of them whose need had driven him on  
to seek out this saintly man on the scene of his temptation  
departed despairing of his dark condition,  
but each restored, raised by that special power  
to health, healed in both body and soul  
went forth in praise and prayer and gratitude  
while God was pleased to grant him longer days.*

*But death's disseverance, dawn of attrition's end,  
was near at hand for the holy man -  
full fifteen years from his first rest in the wilderness.  
The Holy Ghost, the Comforter, came down from above,  
speaking his benediction to the blessed evangelist  
whose breast grew hot and burned with flame,  
his soul filled with the fervent need to find its home.  
Then sudden sickness silted through his veins,  
though Guthlac still maintained his mood of cheerfulness,  
and as the illness took fierce hold,  
it licked like fire at his bony frame.  
This was the bitter cup first brewed for Adam  
by Eve and the Devil when Eden fell.  
From that time on, for that sin's memory,  
no man on Earth could escape or refuse  
the deep cup of death at the door of eternity.  
Nobody born of flesh, bondman or lord  
can fight off its fell advance.  
Just so this death, cold and companion less,  
drew near to Guthlac now through the dark of night.*



*Onefollower remained who daily would attend his cell.  
This man was patient, pure in heart,  
and sought him in the silence if the sacred hall  
that he might hear discourse if heavenly things,  
gladly to glean the teachings if the saint.  
He found his teacher ill-at-ease and sick,  
of a great grief that gnawed him at his heart.  
And thus the servant, speaking to his guide:  
'How can it be your spirit is so sorely tried?  
My friend and master, father, refuge...  
Can you not command words, converse,  
comfort my mind?' Blinded by tears  
he sought to know how the disease would go with him,  
whether indeed the illness would abate.*

*The saint struggled to muster breath,  
enough to answer the anxious man.  
'My friend, these limbs grow fiery with pain:  
the thief death has the keys of my life  
and waits to unlock my body's treasure-house.  
I must exchange it soon for a roof of loam,  
the earthen walls and floor of the grave.  
My soul may seek no more than seven nights' respite:  
at the dawn if the eighth day it will ease away,  
be freed to receive its benedictions, its rewards,  
before God's seat, its journey's end.  
My spirit yearns already for unceasing joys.  
Now you have knowledge of my body's death.  
Its wait was long and tortured in the World.'*

*A time then if weeping and bleak moods:  
the young man's spirit clouded and grew dark,  
knowing the saint's impatience to move on.  
Although he struggled, sorrow spilt in tears  
as he prayed to understand what fate ordained.*

*\*\**

*The seven days had duly passed  
after pain's arrow-shower attacked his lord  
and probed with its barbs his heart's fortress  
when once again the patient youth  
hurried his footsteps to the holy place.  
He found the old man prostrate, overwhelmed,  
much racked with suffering, his sure hope gone.  
The servant's heart was hollow and afraid.  
Knowing the end was near fearful he spoke  
words that till now he had not dared to ask:  
'Beloved lord, best-favoured of God,  
often my mind has troubled me to tell  
who it may be that I hear speak with you  
each evening when the eager-resting sun  
sinks down behind the westward rim  
of the flat fen? Father and comforter,  
reveal this voice, this visitor's identity,  
who speaks with gentleness and great authority,  
invisible, yet audible, alone with you.'*

*After a long pause the pious man  
spoke slowly, struggling for breath:  
'Listen, my friend, this is a secret  
never before broached, betrayed to no-one,  
because I was afraid that fools would prattle,  
make of it a miracle, marvel and embellish it:  
I have no wish to boast or broadcast such a thing,  
or cause displeasure to my Lord and risk His wrath.  
From the second year, my solitude was blessed  
by my Victorious Lord, the Life-giver:  
He saw fit to send a celestial angel  
who came at dusk each dawn and eventide,  
a servant of God, secure in His supremacy,  
healing my every hurt, my heart's anxieties,  
showing me His will through the gift of Wisdom.  
Such wisdom has permitted me intuitively to know  
the inmost thoughts and workings of men's minds  
when they have come for conference to my cell.*

*My loyal confidant, for our love's sake,  
for the sake if the trust sustained between us  
now and always, be answered and be comforted:  
I will not leave you languishing alone;  
I shall be with you even beyond the grave.'*

*Then he sank back, head bowed against the wall,  
not giving up but fighting still  
against the agony of every breath.  
It seemed then the sweetest fragrance,  
like summer blossom scenting the fields,  
spread from his lips and issued forth  
the whole day long, continuing and pure.*

*Across the reeds, the flat wash of the mere,  
the sun's path glittered as it sank.  
The northern sky, swirling with cloud,  
grew dark and overcast, hauling a heavy mist,  
and night in its course bore down upon the earth.  
Then suddenly a light of all-surpassing brilliance  
broke from the heavens above the hermit's cell.  
This holy radiance, a noble brightness,  
shone all the night about the holy-man,  
dissolving shadows in its clarity till dawn  
broke in the east across the old sea-path.*

*Then Guthlac, warrior of God, arose,  
ending his wait, pain's harrowing,  
and spoke humbly, haloed in light.  
'Companion, my friend, the time has come  
when you must go and conscientiously discharge  
the tasks that I have asked of you.  
Carry this message quickly to my sister:  
tell her I have begun my journey on  
along the road to the gloriousness of God.  
I have denied myself her presence in this life  
that we might meet matched in perfection  
and abiding love before God's throne.  
Entrust to her the burial of my corpse  
where soulless it may rest in its sandy hill.'*

*Refreshed by the sacrament he raised his hands  
and seemed to see beyond this life,  
turning his gaze in rapture up to Heaven.*

*Then his cold body Jell away.  
Released, his soul went rising like a lark.*

*At this the light blazed all about  
a bright beacon binding earth and sky,  
a holy incandescence like a fiery tower  
wherein the angels sang anthems of victory  
and saints rejoicing sanctified his path.  
Thus was the island filled with ecstasies,  
sweetness of air and angel-sound,  
transformed, beyond the power of word to tell.  
Even the sun, eclipsed, shone dim,  
the earth shook and silent nature quaked.*

*Meanwhile the messenger grew much afraid,  
with drained courage hastened to his boat  
and launched again across the slate-grey lake.  
His wave-steed briskly slipped the water-face,  
his sorrow like the swirling depths beneath.*

#### At Crowland

Time tears them down, the abbeyes  
and the choirs of stone:  
slow-motion centuries dissolve  
their sandy heads and their saints' bones.

Somewhere across the water-lighted fen  
a barn sinks on its holy quoins;  
behind this wall a pair of drunken bishops  
shoulder-to-shoulder tilt and lean.

Roofless, their pillars rise to loft a firmament  
vaulted with cumulus, pricked out in blue.  
Where jackdaws rasp and pigeons smothering reply,  
here Guthlac keeps his monument alive:  
a vast arched window on the sky  
that swifts skim screaming through

Klee/Clover

Tom Paulin (1949) - *Walking a Line* (1994)

- 1 Nightwatch after nightwatch
- 2 Paul Klee endured
- 3 'horribly boring guard duty'
- 4 at the gasoline cellar
- 5 and every morning
- 6 outside the Zeppelin hangar
- 7 there was drill then a speech
- 8 tacked with junk formulas
- 9 he varnished wings
- 10 and stencilled numbers
- 11 next to gothic insignia
- 12 a private first-class
- 13 with a lippy dislike
- 14 of their royal majesties
- 15 and *Flying School 5 (Bavaria)*
  
- 16 he wrote home to Lily
- 17 *it's nice this spring weather*
- 18 *and now we've laid out a garden*
- 19 *between the second and third runways*
- 20 *the airfield's becoming*
- 21 *more and more beautiful*
  
- 22 each time a plane crashed
- 23 ---and that happened quite often
- 24 he cut squares of canvas
- 25 from the wings and fuselage
- 26 he never said why
- 27 but every smashed biplane
- 28 looked daft or ridiculous
- 29 halfjoky and untrue
- 30 ---maybe the pilots annoyed him?
- 31 those unlovely aristos
- 32 who never knew they were flying
- 33 primed blank canvases
- 34 into his beautiful airfield

## Baroque

James Lasdun (1958) - *Woman Police Officer in Elevator* (1997)

Francesco Borromini (1599-1667)

- 1 Spirit and form: to every soul its shell;
- 2 Sounds their instruments---flute, double bass,
- 3 Trumpet, each instrument its plush-lined case,
- 4 The flesh its cribs, Death its Heaven and Hell.
- 5 Bernini, your lightest-fingered rival,
- 6 Built only on the human scale, filled Rome
- 7 With wooing, delicious airs; *your* dome,
- 8 Dizzying, serial-spiralled, was a skull
- 9 Sucked to the coffered contours of a mind
- 10 Breached by infinity. The Infinite!
- 11 It made you less as well as more than human;
- 12 Implosive, visionary, one hand designed,
- 13 The other flogged a workman till he died,
- 14 Then drew the sword you fell on like a Roman.

Clare Leighton Packs a Bag, 1939

Maura Dooley (1957) - *Explaining Magnetism* (1991)

*What I remember, she said, were her hands, her huge hands, moving in the light.*

She dug up light with a knife,  
whittled shade to the bone,  
heaped up shadow in the comers  
of an English summer's day,  
but everything was too black and white:  
print on a page, a flickering screen,  
the image she cut and bled onto paper,  
reasons to fight, reasons to leave,  
the wastepaper basket spilling over.

Maybe there was love, maybe discovery  
in another country, a southern harvest  
in another country. In London only  
the grey stone, white air, grey stone  
of a country waiting, its cornfields  
ripening to the blare of poppies,  
fireweed flaring in the cities.

Looking out then at all that snow  
she knew paper was never as white  
as this, no ink as black as her mood,  
no wood as heavy, as hard, as this.  
She carved out shade like a cancer,  
slicing towards the light.



Heine in Paris

Hilary Davies 1954 - *The Shanghai Owner of the Bonsai Shop* (1991)

1 How vast this room to the one eye tracing  
2 Its lines of exploration to the door  
3 Outside which onions slice, a woman admonishes  
4 Before clicking four flights down beside the graveyard,  
5 (O, All Souls' Day, the widows flowering  
6 Amongst the sepulchres, green lovers  
7 Lying under the cool yews!)  
8 Till her return now there will be not silence  
9 But these structures with which daily he fills his room  
10 And masters all its changes: blue for summer  
11 When the light should be bright as sand grains;  
12 Red in winter to gash the snows outside  
13 With pathways where his wife will walk protected  
14 From overhanging things.  
15 Today the world he inhabits is russet  
16 And he heaps the multi-coloured leaves  
17 In all the corners till his eyelids glow  
18 With his own sunset. Now the waiting is easy:  
19 In the afternoon he accompanies the gardeners,  
20 Raking and watering with their arms,  
21 Carried to exhaustion in their backs and thighs,  
22 And drunk with light. When they go home,  
23 He is lifted like a feather up the stairs.

24 She comes only when the curtains are drawn;  
25 Sees in his hand the ever thinner tracteries of blood:  
26 'All afternoon I held you under the yew trees  
27 And knew nothing but your scent, the grass,  
28 Over my whole body the climax of the sun.'

Dominikus Zimmermann

Hilary Davies (1954) - The Shanghai Owner of the Bonsai Shop (1991)

- 1 Like a barn: he said, the externals do not matter
- 2 Though upon the exact date of this learning
- 3 There was no consensus. Certainly not from father,
- 4 Uncle or brother. At nine years in Josephus' workshop
- 5 Watched the men bevel till from silence
- 6 They drew a mad dog, a Virgin with Butterfly.
- 7 In the afternoon he saw the carpenters
- 8 Rounded against the open door like moons,
- 9 Their cloth backs flickering at dusk in the beer gardens.
- 10 At seventeen uncovered Emilie's thighs and found them white
- 11 As doves in storybooks
- 12 And when he worked the altar in the parish church
- 13 Gypsum and flesh performed the same undulations.
- 14 The fields of Wessobrunn were opal all that summer.
- 15 He took apprenticeship and saw a little of the wide river
- 16 And how magically its blue reflected heaven.
- 17 Noted for the first time the movement of a thing
- 18 From source to finish, though seeing neither,
- 19 Only the parable of what lay between.
- 20 That was enough. Then marriage. When they brought him
- 21 To the birthroom, sheets were streaked with blood
- 22 Like ancient lintels; downstairs,
- 23 A calf to celebrate the coming of a son.
- 24 When work resumed, he told the assistant builder
- 25 To place the cherubs upon draperies of pain,
- 26 The purgatory in red.
- 27 Easy at the end to accept the abbot's invitation,
- 28 Many things having reached their end, and little desire
- 29 For the stifled streets of Landsberg. The meadows reminded him
- 30 Of his mother fetching in the cows and mushrooms deliquescent after dawn.
- 31 It should be like a barn; the inner space provide
- 32 A case for nature, the white, blue, red
- 33 And upward thrust. His hand to cast

34 Petal and flagellation so finally to say  
35 Between air, wood and interstices what he had learnt.

36 Then stay ten years to worship at his shrine  
37 Walking each day from hut to organ loft  
38 Under the cornice 'Dominikus Zimmermann',  
39 Baumeister, carpenter, master builder.

On William Drummond of Hawthornden

Marion Lomax (1953) - *Raiding the Borders* (1996)

*whose fiancée died on the eve of their wedding*

Well-worn paths from his beloved retreat  
lead me down a hillside, scarred by storms,  
to a face of rock. I can see him  
where the kestrel has made a nest now –  
staring across the churning river,  
tracing the chisel marks above him,  
holding the caves cool and comforting –  
or, striding along the Esk's wild bank,  
he might have opened up his anger,  
conscious that he had lost forever  
this first bright love. Was his grief released,  
dropped hundreds of feet over the high  
edge of garden? Or did it increase –  
a force strong enough to uproot trees?

John Nelson Preaching in Grimsby  
Jack Debney (1941) - *Clowns and Puritans* (1999)

I  
To bear witness  
In one more stubborn town -  
Stinking mudflats make Adam's dough,  
The sea-bluster his breath.  
Rage shakes me.  
Redirecting an old sin,  
I'd press-gang these souls for God!

II  
But until I master rage,  
Until my turmoil becomes the milk of calm,  
Every word I preach  
Is the Tomb left empty,  
A coreless glossolalia.

III  
Before me now  
A man and his bold drum,  
A man hired by the vicar -  
Claret lickspittle of the gentry -  
To drum, drum, drum though my sermon,  
As though I were some kind of tamed bear  
That would shuffle to his idiot's rhythm.

IV  
My voice carrying the centuries,  
Then and now, all one.  
I bank on this, secured  
In the Bible - rant it out!  
I gamble with grace.

But when the Paraclete does descend,  
Quickening the waves beyond these houses,  
Each white horse the tip  
Of a scroll unfurling,  
I know there is no gamble.

Then I know

That God sends doubt like hidden harvest,  
Tests the moment with its seeming death.

V

The hireling's fingers unclench the  
Stick, the silenced drum  
Now like a dropsied belly -  
Sweet reneging!  
His failed trickmaster  
Skulks in the reaches  
Of the church, takes  
Gentry's refuge.

VI

I say that Christ lives  
In this drum falling,  
Lives too  
In the convert's onion tears  
And buffoonish praise,  
Makes me - His preacher -  
For long moments  
A miracle-huckster  
Peeved at a bad accomplice.  
Yes, Christ lives here too,  
In my fear and secret  
Smiling.

VII

When all is finished,  
I will leave these people,  
The flat land, the sea:

A straight, dark man  
Climbing a chalk hill  
At sunset, its swart spine  
Like a tensed bow,  
But his shadow released round him -  
Dancing, a burnished loop.

1829

Alison Brackenbury (1953) – *1829* (1995)

In the year 1829, when Mozart had been dead for over 30 years, his wife Constanza was still alive, alert - though a little frail - and living quietly in Salzburg. There she was visited by an English couple, the Novellos, with whom she talked at length.

In the poem, the first and final sections are spoken by Mozart, the second by Constanza. From death and life, they pursue their argument with a certain Viennese lady, Fräulein von Greiner, whose memoirs had been ecstatic about Mozart's music, but less than complimentary about Mozart himself. They remember others: their two surviving children, Carl and Franz, Puchberg, Mozart's most generous creditor, and Sussmaier, his last pupil.

Many of the poem's details are history. Thanks to the creditors' inventory, we know the exact contents of Mozart's apartment, down to the six 'ordinary glasses' left in his study.

## I

In my new room, between Vienna and Virgo,  
The air, like good coffee, tastes fragrant and black.  
In shifting starlight I read a page  
By Fraulein von Greiner. A half-life ago  
She turned her fine nose and her classical gaze  
On her father's stiff salon, for which I played.  
She murmurs, 'He was the most ordinary soul,  
Who preferred, to our learning, the silliest joke.  
He jumped on a chair, then miaowed, like a cat!'

'Will she still pay you?' my young wife cried,  
Although I had sung her the Fraulein's shock,  
The lilting cry from the throat of a cat.  
Disturbed, she woke, loud morning near;  
Pupils hummed luminous and black  
Moon's answers tugged warm seas to fold.  
No work is ever finished here,  
The rush of space whirls each hot globe.  
Dear gallop's heart, can she be old?

## II

I lean my stick against the bed  
As straight and brittle as my bones.  
The green quilt's watered pattern glows  
Like the fine coat he last had made.

Today, the English couple came  
Who worship him. The kind wife wept,  
She hugged me; but her husband stepped  
Back shrewdly; watched me seek his name.

He saw how small - and faint - it blew,  
That light from forty years ago.  
I also loved the next man who  
Paid bills, made notes, slept quiet by me.  
But they asked of that hard, first end.  
I told my story, smoothly learned.

'The stranger wore the long still face  
A doctor makes. He said, "Someone  
Most dear has died. Her Requiem  
Has been commissioned, at your price.  
Your patron's name must not be known."'

Strange terms! I almost laughed at them.

'As we climbed on the Prague post-coach'  
(I had left Franz, turned four weeks old)  
'A hand dragged on my heavy cloak.  
"It is not ready." No reproach.  
"It shall be done, when I return."  
The grave man nodded, barely spoke.

They met again; I was away,  
With the children, in the storm-tossed park.  
Skies battered with rain. He sat alone.  
I made him drive with me next day.  
He said the work was not for her,  
The strange, dead girl. It was his own.'

How could I know that she was young?  
When that hand clutched, my body shook  
In the child's last shudder. It is all true.  
How desperate we were then, how young.  
I hid beneath the sodden sheets  
In his heat's ruin; would die too.

The last bill for his sea-green coat  
Lay with the rest. I wept again  
To see the wreck of our affairs.  
The papers shone in glare of snow.



Once he was gone, our money grew.  
The dead cannot insult gilt chairs.

When I had woken, weighed and wrung  
By Puchberg's loans; four children gone;  
He would turn, to speak the silly  
Warming names which licked rough tongues.  
He drowned; I breathe. High in this room's  
Neat wastes, who laughs? who aches for me?

That clever Fräulein and her guests,  
Even the kindly English, want  
Something grander than the sun  
Of ordinary happiness.  
It only dazzles them when glanced  
Down from its flying, frozen, done

Fräulein von Greiner, cats may sing.  
I sing the last notes that he wrote.  
I hear him walk to that fresh dark  
Slow as my stick taps, note by note.

### III

That my name is strange as a star:  
  
that she forgets my voice, my hands  
  
that she marries again,  
  
this is death, as life makes it.

The water is streaming along the small road  
the carthorse foal, his awkward head  
spiked with spring's mud, rushes up to the coach.  
Carl points to him, cries.

I could set that; any note. I caught  
Constanza's raw cries as she struggled with Carl.

She could not sing high, as her sisters could,  
the two mad birds at the top of the voice.  
I would have had one. To have high notes for ever-

but no, we live on the middle road  
the coach slowing and rocking, the carthorse foal  
spinning away and Carl's thin voice singing.

She left me too, she went away  
to those costly cures - what did Puchberg say?  
'Is she a fish?' - and I laughed, and saw  
Constanza at Baden, with half-closed eyes  
in the murky expensive baths,  
floating, the heavy child hung light  
as the milk stars whirl, in her private dark  
she swims, and her arms are slender and bare,  
stronger than mine. There she floats, and smiles.

If stars asked questions, they would say  
'Was it hard?' It burned the mind.  
As you would know, Constanza, with  
Your cracking voice, as they would know  
Ringed with the iris of their fires.

Something comes to hold us back.  
It drags and jars the carriage wheels.  
I never loved those small dark rooms -  
Black stove, dull glassware, shut from day -  
In which we lived. To move's to live.  
The roofs, the small fields fall away.

Your sister, Sophie, told the truth.  
'The open score lay on the bed.  
He twitched his mouth to show Sussmaier  
The drum's pulse: the last sound he made.'

He set it wrong; I saw he would,  
I could not teach him anything.  
The Masons cleared the choking bills.  
How smooth things ran, like Sussmaier's drums!  
Listen, you fool: there is a start:  
The jolt of heart, the sudden kiss,  
As first sun beats to rake the skin.

Carl, whose kindly crooked face  
Could never take one lesson in  
Has somehow made a bookkeeper.  
She taught Franz all my songs, then hoped  
To coax him to a prodigy.

His swift career has veered, instead,  
Into a Polish Countess's bed.

They are my children. They are brave,  
Powerful as these icy lights.  
She, straight-backed on her green bed  
Is silence in its straightest flight.

What planet now wears my old coat  
Washed by the rain, as fine as grass?  
What lost suns from the shadows' height  
Throb radiance through my cheap glass?

## Works

Oliver Reynolds (1957) - *The Player Queen's Wife* (1987)

- 1 Staying at Sans Souci, Voltaire
- 2 went over Frederick's poetry for him---
- 3 he called this
- 4 'washing the king's dirty linen'.
- 5 The prose was more self-reliant,
- 6 as is shown by just one title
- 7 from the thirty-volume *Oeuvres*
- 8 (he wrote---and fought---in French):
- 9 *Instructions Militaires*
- 10 *du Roi de Prusse pour ses Généraux.*
- 11 In the Seven Years War
- 12 the Jung-Braunschweig regiment lost
- 13 1,650 men
- 14 through desertion.
- 15 So,
- 16 guard your troops.
- 17 Give them beer.
- 18 Put sentries in the cornfields.
- 19 Never camp near a forest.
- 20 Never march at night.
- 21 The portable field oven can bake
- 22 1,000 6lb. loaves daily.
- 23 Though biscuits take up less pack-space

24 than bread, they're not so sustaining

25 as the men mix them with water  
26 and drink them as soup.

27 Firewood should always be made up of logs:  
28 we forbid the practice

29 of setting alight  
30 the houses of the peasantry.

31 The army is built  
32 on discipline---

33 or, more exactly,  
34 on fear.

35 The common soldier  
36 should fear his officer

37 more than the enemy:  
38 the horse prospers

39 under the eye  
40 of its master.

41 Know the land. Talk to old inhabitants,  
42 especially shepherds and gamekeepers.

43 Before battle, go to the nearest height,  
44 map in hand, and study the view.

45 Cemeteries and sunken roads  
46 make excellent defensive positions.

47 Know the land. What if that marsh  
48 covering your flank

49 turns out to be a dry field?  
50 What if that river freezes over?

## Norman Collie at Sligachan Inn

Stewart Conn (1936) – *In the Blood* (1995)

*Collie is still up in Skye like an eagle in his eyrie but I hope he will get tired of that lonely vigil and come back to London.*

F.G. DONNAN, 1939

Ropes and ice-axes stashed, the climbers  
troop into the dining-room, nodding towards  
the fine-featured octogenarian who slowly  
sips his wine. Puffing his pipe afterwards

in the corrugated-iron smoking-room, eyes  
like quartz chips, he gives nothing away  
at their expressions of amazement that  
so many peaks thought previously unclimbed

should be capped by such similar cairns.  
He smiles as they plan the next day's  
routes and traverses; recalling his own  
and Mackenzie's mastery of the Bhasteir Tooth,

solving the massive shadow of the Cioch...  
They say goodnight, oblivious of his  
unspoken benediction: 'Set your sights  
on your aspirations' limit. The summit won,

let the eye gaze, the spirit brim. Then  
the gods of the mountain not taking kindly  
to abuse of hospitality, make your way down,  
recharged and calm. Nearing the treeline

you will encounter colours intense as any  
you recall, cow-bells resonant in the inner ear.  
Gaze back at the crest where you've been,  
its blueness nothing on its own - rather

the use you put it to.' Continents merge  
as he drifts towards sleep, pursued by troupes  
of Edwardian ladies, ropes round hourglass waists,  
who slip from precipices, abseil into the abyss.

Later he turns in a cold sweat: Mummery  
and Whymper, as on a glass plate, spin past  
in a neon blaze; voices in whispers ask,  
was the rope frayed or mysteriously cut?

Until eased by a chuckle, at his request  
that Leverhulme sponsor an attempt on Everest:  
in return, they'd plant a flag on the summit,  
a bar of Sunlight Soap emblazoned on it.

Mirak

Dick Davis (1945) – *Touchwood* (1996)

Mirak, descendant of the Prophet, born  
About the middle of the fifteenth century:  
An Afghan brought up to the family trade  
Of bow-maker, who as an adolescent  
Turned to reciting the Qoran, was soon  
A praised professional at it, tried his hand  
As a calligrapher and thence became  
The painter of all painters, the miniaturist  
To end them all, the Wonder of the Age,  
The unsurpassed whom kings sought out, who sketched  
From life - while travelling, while a guest at banquets,  
Untroubled whether courtiers crowded him  
Or left him to his own absorbed devices;  
And to the admiration of his time  
Was never seen to use an easel. A man  
Whose passion when not painting was for wrestling  
(Each day he lifted weights to build his strength)  
At which, of course, in due course, he excelled.

A talented young orphan came to him  
To be apprenticed as his servant, page,  
Paint-mixer, gofer, sweeper-up, a boy  
To trace and prick the pounces; now and then  
Allowed to colour inexpensive pieces.  
This was Behzad, whose teacher Mirak was,  
Whose fame eventually eclipsed Mirak's  
And whose pure, sumptuous, gentle miniatures,  
So bright with passion, whimsy and restraint,  
Are now the art's unrivalled masterworks  
While not one solitary sheet has been  
Attributed with any certainty  
To Behzad's quondam teacher - Qoran reciter,  
Bow-maker, calligrapher and wrestler,  
Mirak, surpassed (perhaps) at last, unheld  
By any trade, adept at all he touched,  
Patient for mastery but negligent  
When once he had the mystery in hand:  
Or so we picture him, at this blurred distance.



## A Poor Useless Creature

Tom Paulin (1949) - *Walking a Line* (1994)

1 Jeremy Bentham  
2 that sunny child  
3 had a central heating system  
4 installed in his London home  
5 ---the age of steam  
6 was coming to a head  
7 and Dr Bentham  
8 held modern views  
9 ---they solved he said  
10 the cold problem  
11 ---it was the task  
12 of a long-serving servant  
13 to clear and stoke  
14 the boiler at 5 a.m.  
15 then he had to cook  
16 a mutton or a bacon chop  
17 to stoke the rational engine  
18 that worked upstairs  
19 ---this solved the food problem  
20 but one day sadly  
21 when strapped for ready  
22 he stole two silver spoons  
23 from the dining---the feeding  
24 room as it was termed  
25 those two bald spoons  
26 they solved his cash problem  
27 but the hapless fellow  
28 he didn't know  
29 that he had fried  
30 his final chop  
31 ---those spoons were numbered  
32 tried and sentenced  
33 ---this solved the crime problem  
34 he rode the cart  
35 all the way to Tyburn

36 so he might give pleasure  
37 even happiness of a sort  
38 to a greedy crowd  
39 that gathered with his master  
40 to solve the pain problem  
41 as they watched him drop

## THE EMPEROR'S HEAD

Michael Blackburn (1954) - *The Ascending Boy* (1996)

*The Emperor Justinian*

He walked on floors of blood,  
slept little, wandered  
from one room to another,  
picked at his food.

The dead of his reign  
outnumbered the living.

And more than one eyewitness claimed  
he was really a demon -  
they'd seen his head dissolving  
like an orb of muddy snow  
then vanish from his shoulders.

Sometimes his headless body  
stood by a window as if watching  
or stayed in the centre of the room  
without moving; for minutes, for hours.

Do not laugh, my friend, but imagine  
your own cool terror  
at seeing his head reform  
as if from gobbets of white clay  
till his eyes lay clear upon you  
and his voice demanded

*what are you looking at?*

What We Can See of the Sky Has Fallen

Lavinia Greenlaw (1962) - *A World Where News Travelled Slowly* (1997)

*Luke Howard 1772-1864*

Born into a lost fortune (the wrong royal attachment  
in your *land of reasonable freedom*), a third-generation  
Quaker, excluded from the military or church.

A childhood of freak weather - roused from your bed  
to see the night lit by a meteor, dim days  
of what was later found to have been volcanic smog.

Knowing your expertise and expertly knowing it to be  
of the moment - chemistry was *business*, you insisted,  
industrial secrets. (What was your role in the manufacture

of ether? The debate whispers on.) You slipped once,  
crushing a bottle against your wrist which cut so deep,  
the arsenic (*al-zarnik*, orpiment) gilded your veins.

Those weakened hours; the ellipses and questionmarks  
of science - *ideas*, you called them, eager to admit  
your amateurism, excess Latin baggage and poor maths.

Your ninety-two years held three kings, a queen,  
two planets, Faraday and the first photograph.  
Somewhere between Income Tax and the Battle of Trafalgar

came your essay on clouds: cool distillations  
from your observations' heat. Not giving shape, you found it  
and found yourself ever after skybound, abstracted,

frightening the grandchildren with your carnival of apparatus  
and unfashionably forceful speech. *People say I am weatherwise,*  
*but I tell them I am very often otherwise.*

Raising thousands for relief of the war-tattered continent,  
you disembarked in that half-drowned country  
where the language like the rye bread scoured your tongue.

Taking notes on a stork's dance, its nest's construction,  
Dutch kindness to cattle, how they walk by their horses,  
the Napoleonic roads. The itch of continental quilts,

your infant German, half-grown French, the patchwork  
where you took each meal in a different principality,  
amused by borders like pub signs stuck in a ditch.

Scrutinising evaporation at a salt works, able to see  
banks of snow lift away from a mountain, how the water  
of the Rheinfell is nothing if not boiling snow...

Goethe's *prodigious inclination to sing the Praises  
of Thy Theory of Clouds*. He was avid for the *true observation  
of a quiet mind (and such reasonable beliefs!)*.

Goethe's request, you first thought a hoax. Reassured  
- *one of their very celebrated Poets of Weimar (I think)* -  
you sent your life in ten pages. He wrote at least

twelve thousand letters and received eight thousand more.  
His effusive note promised a full reply of which there is  
no trace in the seven volumes of his life

(something known of every day). You carried a mirror  
into the light, insisting you had less to tell than Franklin  
less to pass over than Caesar.

Sense Data

John Burnside (1955) – *The Asylum Dance* (2000)

*John Goodricke, (1764-1786)*

We measured things for years: our schoolroom walls,  
the growth of plants, lost energy, shed skins.

We counted petals, tadpoles, grains of sand,  
observed migrations, rainfalls, frequencies.

I thought there was a chromatography  
for happiness, or unrequited love,

and somewhere behind it all, in private realms  
of gulls' eggs and stones and things I couldn't name,

another world of charge and borderline,  
an earth-tide in the spine, the nightlong  
guesswork of old voices in the mind.

Waking at night, I would sneak downstairs in the dark  
and know my way by some unconscious craft,

some seventh sense that recognised  
a deeper pulse, the tug of things at rest,

the tension in a table, or a vase  
of goldenrod

- and when I stood outside,

head tilted to a night-sky packed with light  
I waited for a music I could feel

like motion in the marrow of my bones,  
as Goodricke must have done, night after night,

beyond all hearing, resonant as some  
struck bell, harmonics  
singing in his blood,

his fingertips and eyelids bruised with grace  
and tuned into the plainsong of the stars.

TO LIONEL JOHNSON

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Master of the Leaping Figures* (1987)

- 1 Enchanted
- 2 and exhausted man,
- 3 you built a dream
- 4 in Winton stone:
  
- 5 a crystalline, white city
- 6 among hills;
- 7 a cloister for
- 8 heart burial.
  
- 9 Brother stranger
- 10 of 'Death's holy place',
- 11 the yellow leaves
- 12 whose sweet fruit
- 13 galled your tongue
- 14 have fallen long ago,
- 15 but still your spirit
- 16 murmuring through stone
- 17 repeats love's threnody.



The Marquis of Ripon Purchases the Convent of San Damiano  
David Scott (1947) - *Playing for England* (1989)

Up a steep hill and out of town,  
looked after by a shuffling, aproned verger  
doubling as housekeeper to the priest  
was Ripon's Roman Catholic Church,  
St Wilfred's; where Lord Ripon lit the first  
eager candles of his conversion.  
Was it there the idea came to him  
to buy back San Damiano's from the State,  
at a time when places such as those  
were realising very low prices?  
He thought of all the place had meant to him  
(cicadas, cypress, thyme,  
the ancient conjunction of wood and stone,  
the lack of any compulsion to respond)  
when he had visited there with his friend  
and water-colourist, W.B. Richmond.  
The Count of Cavour would have knocked it down,  
used the benches for levering gun-carriages  
out of the mud in his fight against the Austrians,  
and stolen the brittle, silver hair,  
probably not St Clare's, and used it  
for stuffing King Victor Emmanuel's footstool.  
But there, Francis heard the crucifix speak,  
and Clare wrote letters to the Blessed Agnes of Prague  
signing herself 'useless handmaid'.  
For these and other reasons, Lord Ripon paid  
all those noughts of lires  
arguing over the exchange of currency  
and mistranslations, so that the nuns  
could filter back under no pressure to be useful.  
San Damiano's, the place where Francis wrote  
*Il Cantico di Frate Sole*, under its Yorkshire landlord  
was returned to an acre of grace.

## GEORGE FOX CROSSES THE BAY

Neil Curry (1937) - *Ships in Bottles* (1988)

- 1 On the beach at Bardsea, the cocklewomen
- 2 Stood watching, waiting, dry-eyed for them to drown.
- 3 Around their horses' hooves a rip-tide was racing
- 4 And swirling away the brogs of gorse
- 5 That had marked safe-passage over the sands,
- 6 So now it was too late even for them to turn.
- 7 But that speck against the dark sky,
- 8 What was it? Was it a star rising?
- 9 Was it a sign? Later they would tell
- 10 How the great God Himself had parted
- 11 The waters; how that Quaker hat of his,
- 12 That stayed, God save us, undoffed
- 13 Even at Swarthmoor, had been a halo
- 14 Round his head; would bear witness
- 15 To the grit that lodged in the hard shells
- 16 Of their cockled hearts as he rode towering by.

Didius Julianus Imperator

John Heath-Stubbs (1918-2006) - *Sweetapple Earth* (1993)

'Daddy, you must buy it!'  
How his daughters, his daughters and his wife  
Egged him on, 'You must buy it, Daddy!'  
They meant, of course, the Roman Empire.

The Praetorian guard, having disposed  
Of the last unlucky incumbent, had decided  
To put the whole caboodle up for auction -  
Sale to the highest bidder. He could afford it too.  
He'd made his pile, this acquisitive man,  
Exporting savoury fish sauce  
To all the further provinces;  
And from the blood and bruised backs of the slaves,  
Groans of the starving poor.

The gavel struck. He paid down cash  
(It jingled with a kind of hollow laughter),  
Assumed the purple, made a few  
Tedious speeches to the somnolent  
And ineffectual Senate. Before the year was out  
He'd gone the way of all the others. The Praetorians  
Notched up another tally.

'The world at sale' - no, not really the world,  
Merely the fringe of a Mediterranean fish-pond.  
In the high Andes, Guatemalan forests,  
Beside the Yangtze or the Brahmaputra,  
Other great states, each one claiming  
That it was universal, tottered onwards,  
Oblivious of Rome, towards  
Their own inevitable disintegration.

As for his wife and daughters, I don't suppose  
History has any news of them.  
I like to think that they perhaps retired  
To the Roman equivalent of a private hotel  
In some salubrious resort - Baiae for instance -  
And bored the other guests with detailed anecdotes  
About the reign of mighty Didius.  
We only know of it distilled,

A few brief sentences  
Where we may savour Gibbon's irony,  
While still great empires fall about our ears.

## The Banquet

R. S. Thomas (1913-2000) – *Residues* (2002)

That will be the repast  
(come, sit down and sup with me  
in my kingdom) both men using  
the long spoon, while time

waits on them with its glass  
menu. No choice of dessert  
there, other than to remember:  
Hitler with his 'Sorry about

the six million Jews'; Stalin conscious  
that behind his moustache  
his smile has become the transparent  
lid over as many coffins.

## This is His Coat

Oliver Reynolds (1957) - *The Player Queen's Wife* (1987)

- 1 A plain officer's coat
- 2 of Prussian blue
- 3 with red collar and cuffs
- 4 (which allowed any subaltern
- 5 to claim he wore
- 6 *des Königs Rock* ),
- 7 the whole of the front
- 8 is powdered and smeared
- 9 with Spanish snuff.
- 10 The pockets are lined
- 11 with chamois leather
- 12 so as not to scratch
- 13 any of his collection
- 14 of fifteen hundred
- 15 jewelled snuff-boxes.
- 16 Unusually,
- 17 he wore his sword-sash
- 18 outside the coat
- 19 hoping the sash and sword
- 20 would mask his odd shape---
- 21 the wide hips and hollow back.
- 22 He felt the cold
- 23 and buttoned the lapels
- 24 across his chest
- 25 which also helped to secure
- 26 the dog he often rode with
- 27 snug under his chin.

28 (Greyhounds were his favourite  
29 and he built graves for them  
30 on the terrace at Sans Souci.)

31 His love of dogs  
32 was shared by a later leader:  
33 Hitler, saying that only Eva Braun

34 and Blondi were faithful to him,  
35 would quote Frederick's remark:  
36 'Now I know men, I prefer dogs.'

Burke and Hare  
Frieda Hughes (1960) – *Waxworks* (2002)

Burke, being penniless,  
Tried to work out  
Who would put up the least resistance  
If he borrowed from them.

It occurred to him  
With sudden clarity of vision,  
That those who would not complain  
Were those who could not talk.

And the dumbest of them all  
Were the dead.  
He could dig up each ended life  
And render it with meaning.

He could write out its diaries  
And dismember its intention  
In his own words,  
So to speak.

He could sell it then, as newly anointed  
For vivisection. His work  
Was all in the discovery,  
In the presentation,

And his part done,  
He would start looking for another one.  
Funerals were thin on the ground  
When he met Hare,

Who kept a household for trolls  
And travellers, and an idea  
For earning a penny or two  
From their blood and history,

Each one different for the slab,



For the butcher's table,  
As one by one  
They died.

But in the end, not fast enough  
For Burke and his new friend.  
They couldn't wait for the cadaver  
So now, the corpses were fresh

From a drunken cup  
And the feathers of a pillow.  
And someone was recognized  
As too recently alive.

Then Burke himself, was sold on to die,  
And Hare counted the most  
He'd ever made for the trade,  
In his days left.

Imprisoned in the room of his head  
All he could see was the price  
Per passer-by. He must have wept  
To watch so much money walking.

## Hitler and His Mother

Susan Wicks (1947) - *Open Diagnosis* (1994)

*'A l'heure où je vous parle, Hitler s'est endormi en suçant son pouce ...'*

*Patrick Modiano, La Ronde de Nuit*

1 Did even Hitler have a mother  
2 to feed him and wrap him in towels,  
3 lower him to the rusty water,  
4 while above him the geyser  
5 snorted its hot message? Did he lie there  
6 and splash gently, bending his fat knees,  
7 squealing as she sponged suds over him  
8 like another skin, soaped him  
9 in the folds of his chin like a baby?  
10 Did he look up at the ceiling,  
11 follow the old cracks running  
12 from one corner, forking towards sounder  
13 plaster? Did he see spiders? When she  
14 lifted him and folded him to her  
15 did she play counting-games with him---  
16 church, steeple, clergyman,  
17 little piggies---call him  
18 the cleanest one in the family,  
19 show him his white skin all wrinkled  
20 as the water ran off him in rivers,  
21 dance like a child with him,  
22 tell him he had washerwoman's fingers?

Rasputin

Frieda Hughes (1960) – *Waxworks* (2002)

He's selling God, you can buy the book;  
Six dollars a bible. He sells life insurance  
On the side and can do a deal  
On a car for the cash and a ride.

His wife is pregnant again - each child  
By a stranger, he says to the girls  
Who want to understand his vast kindness  
In taking on another man's burden.

If they looked a little closer they'd see  
His face on each of the three, bastards  
By rumour only, his wife undone  
And left when he found another one.

But his eyes like pointy spears, darting out  
From their almond greens, are looking  
For anyone who won't ask questions  
And move him on. What he has seen

Are the voids that women carry; their wounds  
Wanting to be stopped up and gagged.  
'Come sin with me,' he tells them,  
'And my forgiveness will set you free.'

'God is embedded bodily, as if I have  
Been marked out by the gift  
Of his most powerful blessing and made  
Immortal. My hands are magic.'

And his hands performed. They took  
Houses, cars and chequebooks.  
The old and the infirm came to him,  
Their powers of attorney flapping

Like winter cloaks, eager to be given

To a man who promised warmth  
In return for their investment.  
When, one by one, cast out as empty,

The men and women stood up in only  
The emperor's new clothes, they discovered  
He'd been poisoned once for fraud, and lived,  
As if God acknowledged his apology.

So this time they shot him.

Houdini

Frieda Hughes (1960) – *Waxworks* (2002)

Houdini hangs like a swinging peach,  
Ropes twisted and knotting,  
Chains padlocked, and limbs caught up  
In a foetal crouch.

He is convinced that his sister  
Is the mistress of his misfortune  
Because his ties were fastened  
By his stepmother's fingers,

And he wants to find a goat  
He can scape for the fault  
He wishes to relieve his stepmother of,  
So she won't cast him off like a stitch.

He watched his sister cut free  
When she accepted the umbilical scissors  
In her stepmother's voice  
And thorny embrace,

Not pretending any more  
That the blades of severance  
Were not hidden in every welcome,  
Because she wore her mother's face.

But Houdini, with a look like his father's,  
Knew he'd been favoured. So the knots  
That grind his flesh, and the padlocks  
That staple his chains, madden him now.

He will hang for as long as it takes  
To let his stepmother go, and know  
She would always have done what she did  
And hidden it, just the same.

## Air and Water

Stewart Conn (1936) – *In the Blood* (1995)

(for James Rankin)

The Bible beaten into him (thrashed excessively but exclusively on week-days, to preserve the calm of the Sabbath) Muir one of three children (the others left with their mother in Dunbar) taken to settle in the Wisconsin prairie. First Fountain Lake;

then Hickory Hill where when he was twelve his father, desperate to hit water, lowered him in a bucket with hammer and chisel, to hack obdurate sandstone out. Eighty feet down, the air so carbonised he collapsed and could have died, if not hauled to the surface.

Subsequently University, and departure from home: thereafter his own man. But nightmares the remainder of his life, choking in an underground pit - the father stentorian as ever; his comeuppance that his son, Nature's disciple, would not credit its glories to God.

Years later on the Yosemite trail, the thrawn old Scotchman he'd become leaping naked from a snow-pool to challenge his President to a wrestling-bout: an immigrant, battling for his American dream, tackling Big Business head-on. The marvel, he won.

Roosevelt, needing the Californian vote, later to welch on him, turning Hetch-Hetchy into a dam. Muir still worshipping his open spaces, the supreme escape from that father who drove him below ground. What better than a Wilderness, to liberate the mind.

Stan Laurel

John Mole (1941) - Depending on the Light (1993)

Ollie gone, the heavyweight  
Balletic chump, and now  
His turn to bow out, courteous,  
A perfect gentleman who  
Tips his hat to the nurse

Or would, that is, if he were  
Still in business. She  
Adjusts his pillow, smooths  
The sheets until their crisp-  
And-even snow-white starchiness

Becomes his cue. It's time  
For one last gag, the stand-up  
Drip-feed: *Sister,*  
*Let me tell you this,*  
*I wish I was skiing,*

And she, immaculately cornered  
For the punch-line: *Really,*  
*Mr Laurel, do you ski?* A chuckle -  
*No, but I'd rather I was doing*  
*That than this,*

Than facing death, the one  
Fine mess he's gotten into  
That he can't get out of  
Though a nurse's helpless laughter  
Is the last he hears.

## Dynastic

Annemarie Austin (1943) – *The Flaying of Marsyas* (1995)

*Joanna of Castile, 1479-1555*

*Margaret of Austria, 1480-1530*

*Catherine of Aragon, 1485-1536*

### 1

You are two years old.  
This is your wedding day.  
In a great cathedral in a distant country  
your uncle acts as proxy to repeat your marriage vows  
*per verba de futuro*; and another child,  
transported in his long clothes in a noblewoman's arms,  
is bound to you as husband  
sight unseen.

Now you are princess, duchess, *Madame le Reine* of France;  
yours is the highest rank here in the castle;  
someone is making you a little crown  
just like a plaything but of serious gold  
with real gems in its insets. You are cold  
from their deference; no one may handle you,  
and metalled fabric stands you stiff upright  
and back from everybody in the rooms.

You learn the rule is 'to defend right and rank'  
by 'honourable bearing', 'cold and self-assured'...  
But what does it mean and where does it apply  
when suddenly the bird springs up from the garden bush  
and you try to toddle after in your jewels?

You cannot see the change to your body's nature:  
that nested inside the child is a tiny woman  
who is really the ring to enclose a king's  
gold member; ring passed across an ocean  
from one country to another in a giant's marriage;  
ring whence the mongrel two-tongued children  
must burst into the world and turn it  
flat for themselves to lie on, all one throne...

You are the means, a flesh circle with the empty centre  
through which the business of the dynasty is conducted,  
the needle's eye whereby your family



may troop with all its goods to earthly heaven...  
But this is secret from you, generally unsaid;  
it shows as manufacture of bright cold gold instead.

The voyage out

from the nest, from first base,  
 into the eye of the wind;  
 from the rest of the same bone,  
 the known bodies, into empty space;  
 from the garden of the bird bush  
 into the sea's furrowed field...

You stand at the rail and pray mechanically -  
 'now and at the hour of our death, amen'; and then  
 blasphemously - 'if it be possible,  
 let this cup pass from me'. But the great vessel  
 of the sea is swilled by an unseen hand  
 and its waves lip against the rim of the horizon;  
 the cup is too big to pass away - you are in it  
 like a sop of bread and washed about  
 without any say in such a matter .

...from hand to hand into nothing;  
 from the case of familiar rooms,  
 the original view from the window,  
 into a blur of sky like fainting;  
 from rugs and paintings, chairs,  
 into an endless blank...

Margaret, you believe you will die in this limbo  
 still unbedded. What is the use of that trained denial,  
 sacrifice to a distant father's will, unless  
 some end is reached, a real crown put on?  
 The deck lurches underneath you and the clouds  
 whirl round. You are sick at the very core  
 of your velvet metallised gown, your backbone  
 turned to a vial of troubled liquid. There's no land  
 in which to lay your virgin body down.

Each court is approximately the same  
 as every other court. But behind  
 a jewelled procession thin as cut-out paper:  
 a new and savage country with a different light  
 from yours, with house facades like steeples

and a people speaking with stuffed mouths -  
the vowels spilling down their alien chins.

So he must be your home base  
who was chosen husband almost at your birth:  
Arthur or Henry, Charles or Juan, Philip or Philibert –  
just names for the stable spot at the eye  
of the whirling. You look at him again, again,  
assessing his worth whom you must love  
by prior arrangement...

And you fall, Joanna - as from a high tower  
into a well - in another country where the population  
splutter consonants towards you as they move  
through soupy light that slops against  
the stepped gable-ends of buildings.  
He that is nicknamed 'Handsome' gives his hand  
and you drop into the moistly echoing dark.

Lost utterly now, and blind to everything  
except his touch, the glimmer of his face  
at the end of the mole's tunnel, where he passes  
with another lady in the circle of his arm.  
Duty sits lightly on him, while your own  
has merged into the marrow of your bones,  
twisted within the heartstring strumming at your red centre.

4

Catherine, you are brought to bed again  
of a dead child. This is not co-operating  
with the dynastic plan whereby this man  
spawns smaller replicas of himself  
to fill the ever-diminishing-to-the-distance  
thrones of an eternal kingdom.

Consider your sister. Her offspring will accept  
a clutter of crowns in France, Portugal and Denmark,  
in Hungary and the Empire. Ten years of effort  
achieved this simple thing - live children  
in the cradle and the crowds' acclaim  
at trumpeters' loud announcements.

Instead you swim in the dim of a shrouded room  
where waiting-women walk on tiptoe and restrain

their words. He visits you less each time,  
the disappointed... all he has asked and you  
have failed him, not doing what any washerwoman  
can - springing red noisy babes again, again.

Though such a skivvy cannot bring  
your blue-veined white skin to the task,  
your jewels, your genealogy most of all.  
It is a paradox: what makes you marriageable  
must sap your strength for sweating labour –  
those kissing cousins weighing down the tree.

5

Leftover life to be consumed in whatever way  
it pleases you. You have shaken loose  
from the dynastic process and swim on your own  
at last in the cold indifferent sea. A widow  
past your prime, a done-with person by and large,  
locked in the pocket of your own obsession:  
Joanna, in a place without windows, gazing at the beauty  
of your Philip's embalmed face as he lies long dead;  
Margaret, ordering the mausoleum where Philibert's  
image and your own shall turn stone heads  
to mix looks somewhere in the air between you;  
and Catherine, grass widow, in those lonely manor houses,  
refusing to surrender any name of queen or spouse...

It comes apart at a touch,  
remaindering fragments  
like a torn, illuminated  
Book of Hours... a strip of knees  
and spurs from a hunting expedition  
...squares of so blue a distance  
they draw the eyes to drown...  
a platter or two from the banquet  
where the cock stood up in the dish  
and crowed (an attested miracle,  
marginal here)... crowns on a journey  
...so many disembodied lifted hands...

You tarnish slowly, growing a little shabbier  
with each year away from married glory  
when they polished you for appearances, those minions.  
The ring thins on your finger, the slipper underneath

your heel, the bone inside its velvet sleeve.  
With age you grow invisible to kings and popes  
and princes; no longer ripe enough for  
wedding-bed or childbed, withered, you are given  
some space out of time for your own after all...  
Soon you will stand in the midst of a ring  
of birds as they fly up from their bushes  
to circle above your head in the whirling sky.

The Patagonian Nightingale  
Lavinia Greenlaw (1962) - *Night Photograph* (1993)

*The colonists have 3 flour mills, 8 threshing-machines, 70 reaping machines, 6 pianos, 3 harps, a brass band and more than 100 violins... Music is much cultivated and Miss Lloyd-Jones is called the Patagonian Nightingale.*

*The Standard*, Buenos Aires, 1889

Her hands play with the map on her apron,  
Carmarthen and Cardiff slip through her fingers  
as exotic and dangerous as the red dragon  
that used to hang above the mantelpiece.

Her son fills the room with Spanish gestures.  
She sends him to sleep with stories of Wales,  
a country drawn from her parents' memories,  
where you did not have to fight the weather  
but rain fell like a lace curtain  
and sunlight passed, barely noticed.

She remembers her father learning to hunt  
like the Indians with a three-ball sling,  
and bartering rum for meat and skins.  
His newspaper was always twelve weeks old  
but he inched his way down the columns for hours  
and swore this valley was like all valleys,  
only, here, spring came in October.

The summer she married, there were dresses from Europe.  
She sang at dances every Saturday night  
and fell for a cousin who translated himself  
into ApJuan, Welsh son of Spanish John,  
looking backwards and forwards in two syllables.  
He decided the voice of Mary Lloyd-Jones would be  
his to cherish and keep safe at home.

Now she meets the train at the new Bethesda or Bryn Crwm  
and sends cheese or butter to be sold in Buenos Aires.  
After chapel she sifts flour, picks out weevils  
and soaks scarce currants in strong cold tea  
to make barabrith because her mother did.

Some days she tests that remote language  
and tells anyone who'll listen what they already know:

how her pregnant mother crossed the Atlantic,  
three months of hymns and seasickness,  
and how Mary was the first Welsh child to be born  
in Patagonia. And they named the hills for her.

## The Horse-drawn Sun

Kathleen Jamie (1962) - *The Queen of Sheba* (1995)

We may lie forsaken in the earth's black gut,  
but days are still lit, harvests annual,  
skies occasionally blue.  
So remember. Pay heed.

Our struggle to surface  
after thousands of years is, forgive me,  
to break up with a nightmare. Apposite  
mate for a horse of the light?

Forget it. Were I not sacred  
my work would be duller than  
turning a threshing mill.  
But it's nothing; an honour.

I draw strength from the burden I've hauled  
like a Clydesdale through a hundred  
closed generations. But what's an age?  
a mere night. I sense light

near exhumation, the plough-share  
tearing the earth overhead.  
- Go on; blind me. Hear the whinny beneath  
the tremor of sun underground. Let us out

to raise a new dawn this dull afternoon.  
Let us canter high and look down.  
This is the sacred horse drawing the sun.  
Let's see what they've lost. What they've become.



## TICHBORNE

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Master of the Leaping Figures* (1987)

(To Chidioc Tichborne (1558-86), executed for his part in the Babington Plot.)

1 There is no place deeper in earth---  
2 where the young quick river grows  
3 and cressy streams feed it  
4 on beds of purest chalk stones;  
5 and the rhythms of settlement  
6 remember a life before his,  
7 from Vernal Farm through meadow,  
8 copse and ploughland, and St Andrews  
9 standing against curve and swell,  
10 where Catholic and Protestant  
11 share a roof, and members  
12 of his family who succeeded him  
13 figure in stone.  
14 His place is not with those  
15 who gained the world.  
16 Nor can there be an elegy  
17 for one who wrote his own:  
18 the perfect balance  
19 of a man who would soon be  
20 'bowelled alive and seeing'.  
21 About to die, his claim  
22 was a faithful occupation  
23 older than the Normans;  
24 a long life before him here,  
25 which he planted again  
26 on the scaffold, in Tichborne earth.

## Galileo's Salad

John Heath-Stubbs (1918-2006) - *Galileo's Salad* (1996)

Democritus, laughing philosopher -  
Atoms dancing in the void. A maverick donkey  
Wandered through the market place, helping himself  
From produce stalls, until at length he came  
Upon a booth, in which a skilful goldsmith  
Had displayed his wares - among the rest  
A marvellous gold platter, and upon it,  
To indicate its function, a dozen or so  
Of green figs had been placed.  
The donkey scoffed these too - Democritus,  
Who by mere chance was there, convulsed  
In a wild paroxysm of helpless laughter.  
It was his death - still guffawing,  
As it disintegrated, his thin soul  
Plunged in the meaningless void.

Galileo was ready for his supper.  
He'd slogged all day over his books and papers  
Tackling those atomists. At night his optic tube  
Would sweep the sky, observing  
Jupiter's satellites and the phases  
Of mutable Venus - all the planets,  
Our Earth among them, dancing round the sun,  
Like priests that dance around a central altar.  
His wife set down a plate of salad before him.  
He gave a wryish smile. 'It seems,' he said,  
'If what they'd prove is true, had lettuce leaves,  
Radishes and cress and cucumber,  
Salt crystals, peppercorns, and a fine dew  
Of olive oil and vinegar, been drifting round  
In empty space, since the beginning of time,  
They would at length have chanced to come together  
To make a salad.' 'But not: answered his wife,  
'One that's as fresh, well-seasoned and well-mixed  
As this of mine is.' Later, he recommended  
That remark of hers to his opponents.

## Sonnet: Pepys in 1660

Gavin Ewart (1916-1995) - *The Young Pobble's Guide to His Toes* (1985)

1 Everybody is openly drinking the King's health!  
2 The King is about to be back! There are bonfires  
3 everywhere!  
4 Stable government, King and Parliament, not  
5 Cromwell's wobbly son!  
6 Yet Pepys, at sixteen, saw with satisfaction the King's  
7 beheading.  
8 "There's a Divinity doth hedge a King,  
9 rough-hew him how we will!"---Samuel Butler's joke.  
10 Charles II promises a free pardon,  
11 proceedings only against those named by Parliament.

12 As you read, you can see what is coming.  
13 Exhumation and gibbeting of regicides---  
14 hanging, drawing and quartering for those still living.  
15 We are still in the century when Shakespeare died,  
16 where the racks and the fires were not thought  
17 barbaric...  
18 with Pepys, his music, his ideas of order, a civilized  
19 man.

Columbus

Robert Hull (1936) - *Encouraging Shakespeare* (1993)

'Generally it was my wish to pass no island without taking possession of it.'

The slaves were not profitable  
'for almost half of them died'

but there were spears to be had  
for broken crockery

and untouched rings of islets  
like trinkets.

And though the Great Khan  
finally went missing

and the gold pagodas  
faded with the mists

there was the first flamingo  
pink as dawn

there was the terminal innocence  
of rivers.

When enough naked harbours  
had been manacled

enough grief  
requisitioned

a cargo of fables  
set out for Spain, heavy

with lilting names-  
Cathay      Indies

conquistadores      spices  
syphilis.

JANET HORNE

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) – *Cathures* (2002)

In Dornoch there was a burning  
With no sign of mourning  
That January morning

This was the final solution  
The last execution  
Of an ancient persecution

For they called it witchcraft  
An old woman's stitchcraft  
Or a bit of leechcraft

Century of enlightenment  
Still thirled to torment  
Thumbscrews and judgement

Janet made a pony  
Of her daughter, says the story  
Rode her for Satan's glory

They tarred her and feathered her  
Bound her and gathered her  
Screaming and barrelled her

Burning in the peat-smoke  
While the good Dornoch folk  
Paused briefly for a look

Dear God were you sleeping  
You were certainly not weeping  
She was not in your keeping

Today there is a garden  
Where a stone stands guard on  
The spot she was charred on

O heart never harden!

MADELEINE SMITH

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) – *Cathures* (2002)

O Madeleine was a well-bred lass  
Brought up in Glasgow and Rhu.  
She fell in love with a warehouse clerk  
And her dad said 'That won't do!  
It won't do at all! So ditch him quick!'   
But she went and bought some arsenic.

*Cocoa, cocoa, stir it well.*

*Drink it down and go to hell.*

A merchant makes a suitable match,  
Her father had it planned.  
Emile grew jealous, uttered threats,  
But it all got out of hand.  
Was Madeleine tired of her Frenchie boy?  
Or was she afraid of his power to destroy?

*Cocoa, cocoa, stir it well.*

*Drink it down and go to hell.*

O terrible were the stomach pains!  
Emile lay down to die.  
Madeleine played the piano, and  
Was there a tear in her eye?  
Madeleine was cool and knew her role.  
A well-bred woman has self-control.

*Cocoa, cocoa, stir it well.*

*Drink it down and go to hell.*

Up through a trap-door in the dock  
She rose in a brown silk gown.  
'Colour of cocoa', muttered a juror,  
Silenced by the judge's frown.  
The trial ended with Madeleine's smile.  
'Not proven', oh yes, that was her style.

*Cocoa, cocoa, stir it well.*

*One of us must go to hell.*

JOHN MUIR

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) – *Cathures* (2002)

Lakes and canyons, woods and streams,  
Blue sierras to traverse -  
What did he write in his daybook?  
'John Muir, Earth-Planet, Universe'.  
    Wilderness be wild and free  
    Song-thrush in the live-oak tree

Ragged soldiers, runaway slaves,  
Rattlesnakes and ravening bears –  
Gunless John marched on regardless,  
An innocent among the snares.  
    Wilderness be wild and free  
    Ice and snow and frozen sea

John Muir is standing on his head!  
That way, the Grand Canyon's grander,  
Its reds are redder, its limes are livider,  
Its smoky greys are rich as lavender.  
    Wilderness be wild and free  
    The eagle and the wandering bee

'Nothing is really dead,' said John.  
The water-meadow breathes its prayer.  
Teach us what an orchid feels  
Or a stone flung through the air.  
    Wilderness be wild and free  
    Unlock nature with a key

He broke a mustang, built a cabin,  
Watched the glaciers creeping down,  
While memories of grey Dunbar  
Filtered through from his home town.  
    Wilderness be wild and free  
    North Sea to Yosemite

Wilderness be free and wild  
For every man woman child

HELEN ADAM

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) – *Cathures* (2002)

She was the magic crow  
Oh – ho -  
Who flew from Glasgow  
To San Francisco

In the morning of the Beats  
See - see-  
She threw back the sheets  
Greeted the streets

If her words were surreal  
Real- real-  
She shone like an eel  
Sang like a seal

Changing, ranging  
Neigh - neigh -  
A kelpie breenging  
Bringing a ring

Cat-headed woman  
Woo-woo-  
Dog-headed man  
Catch if you can

She had ballads for all  
Caw-caw-  
Scotch waterfall  
Purple and pall

Her reels and her dances  
Da-da-  
Flickered like sconces  
From long-dead manses

What a starry array  
Fey-fey-  
Waiting for day  
In Americay



## IN THE CELLS

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) – *Cathures* (2002)

*i.m. Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774*

'The night is young,' they said, 'it's only nine.  
We've brought a carriage for you, see, it's there.  
What your blue devils need is a wheen wine.  
Put on your coat, there's a nip in the air.'  
They took him to the madhouse, not the club.  
As the gate clanged behind him, he set up  
A howl the inmates echoed in hubbub.  
One more in hell! One more to drain the cup  
Of horror, pick the sleepless straw! He sang,  
He did, but it came out like the scream  
That wakened him a week before: a cat  
Had caught a starling in its playful fang,  
Squeezing and rending its joy and the poet's dream:  
A throat fluttering to death: it was like that.

Edward I

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

He had been playing chess.  
With whom?  
Toom Tabard, perhaps-  
King Nobody!

But he had got up  
to pace the room,  
when from that shadowy  
and uncharted area  
above him,  
from that high vaulting,  
a clan of ancestral granite  
came tumbling down  
on to his chair.

He had been about  
to declare the game  
a stalemate.

But instead, he  
swept north  
to Dunbar and  
the Palace of Scone:

there claimed,  
in case it should one  
day fall  
and crush the English throne,  
the stone  
that was a nation's destiny.

Edward II

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

It was to Berkeley Castle that they brought  
Him after they had beaten him, hoping to  
Starve him, and when he wouldn't be starved,

Inserted into his rectum a red-  
Hot, specially procured, ox-roasting  
Spit, that his body should not bear any mark.

Indeed it did not. But what remains of him,  
His effigy, has been so scratched, scored with  
Such viciousness, that all you can see is

I.H. pleading from the blank eyes, while his  
Hair twists and snakes in supplication -  
Smoke from an inextinguishable wrong.

The Black Prince

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

From Crecy, from Poitiers,  
the bundles come, and  
from each hops the Plague.

It bursts out in swellings  
of pride, tongues that swing  
deliriously in the church towers,

fountains that spew red wine,  
and all the fascias  
blotched with tapestry.

Gold cups from Gascony, rings,  
coins, chains, old Norman battleswords,  
robes, and rich French furs,

all are unwrapped and  
gloated over, regarded as  
tokens of God's love.

From Crecy, from Poitiers,  
they return: the black rats  
following their Black Prince.

Darwin in Patagonia

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *The Wound-dresser's Dream* (1996)

I brood on the process  
of perfection and the less  
perfectly gliding squirrels

in the parallel light of the afternoons  
I study the creatures  
constructed for twilight

I am never completely well;  
the lakes hang like mica templates  
in the brackish air

the winds pour from La Plata,  
flies breed in the navels  
of young mammals

I record the diving thrushes,  
the woodpeckers  
in the treeless wastes

the ice floes  
which may formerly  
have transported foxes;

across the straits  
the barbarians multiply  
*The horse among the trumpets saith 'Aha!'*

I take quinine and speculate  
on the slashing claw  
in the folded schists

but still dream  
of Adam naming  
the doubtful species

and wake shuddering  
at the irreproachable design  
of the eye.

Alexis St Martin

Jo Shapcott (1953) - *Electroplating the Baby* (1988)

1 The morsels, tied to string, are lowered again  
2 into the marinade. Today it's beef;  
3 it's gone on every day for nine years now.  
4 He says he's trying to evolve a system---  
5 set down on tiny charts---to show how long  
6 digestion takes in lots of different cases:  
7 with different temperatures, time limits, in  
8 the stomach and outside in jars. He says---  
9 straight out---it is my solemn, human duty  
10 to let him bow like some old mandarin  
11 over my belly wound so many times a day.  
12 Although the wound was not the end for me  
13 the hole---closed like a valve---is permanent:  
14 The accidental bullet from the musket  
15 sealed my future: adulation, he says,  
16 or at least some fame in scientific journals!

17 I'd like to sit at a table without his jar  
18 waiting to collect the seeping gastric juices.  
19 I've run away. Renewed my family ties  
20 and took myself a squaw with waist-length hair.  
21 I was her hero: she loved to serve and feed me  
22 and even bathe me in the summer streams.  
23 It was a place where charts and words were absent  
24 but he was clever---in four months tracked me down.  
25 He called me worthless, nekkid, drunk; invoked  
26 my duty and took his spoon to the sludge again.  
27 He says I should be very proud of being  
28 a partner in the holy race for knowledge.  
29 But I yearn for an ordinary life  
30 where the textures of my insides aren't on view.

## The Life and Life of Henrietta Lacks

Carole Satyamurti (1939) - *Love and Variations* (2000)

1 That was me in the New Look  
2 sassy as hell, in the days  
3 when wicked was wicked;  
4 not the fist on hip of a woman  
5 who knows she's cooking  
6 a time bomb tumour;

7 not a number's up smile  
8 like a dame who figures  
9 she'll not be getting the wear  
10 from all those yards  
11 of cloth she scrimed for,  
12 who'll be dead at thirty.

13 Dead? For forty years  
14 my cloned cervical cells  
15 have had a ball in Petri dishes  
16 gorging placenta soup,  
17 multiplying like their crazy mother  
18 ---the first ever cell line,

19 flung like spider's thread  
20 across continents I never got to visit,  
21 the stuff of profits, reputations  
22 from Melbourne to Baltimore;  
23 hot property, burning mindless  
24 energy I'd have known how to use.

25 They never asked. Never said  
26 *How's about you live for ever* ,  
27 *like immortal yogurt* ? I'm bought,

28 sold like cooking fat. But I get even,  
29 grow where I'm not supposed,  
30 screw up experiments.

31 Soon, they'll have the know-how  
32 to rebuild me from a single cell.  
33 A rope of doubles could jitterbug  
34 from here to Jupiter. Meantime,  
35 I'm grabbing my piece of the action,  
36 hungry to cry my first cry again.



## The Frog

Ian Duhig (1954) - *The Bradford Count* (1991)

(for Leon McAuley)

The ollamh faltered in his staves,  
a gilly spilled his wine-cask:  
the Ossory court circled a wonder;  
'It is the living budget of The Morrígan!'  
'It is the handsomest child of a Connachtman!'  
'It is the ghost of a drunkard's stomach!'  
'Without doubt, it's a Fomorian cat.'  
'Without doubt, it's from Paddington.'  
'Without doubt, it's an ugly bugger isn't it?'

The frog gulped, swivelled its headlamp eyes  
and burped like an earl. The hall stilled,  
its eyes fixed on Duvenold,  
king and seer. He knew he must pronounce –  
Warfare, Pestilence, the Gael in Chains –  
that sort of thing. It was expected. 'Friends,'  
he cried, 'this hare-fish means Death to Ireland;  
Warfare, Pestilence, the Gael in Chains!  
It also shags that poem of Muldoon's.'

## The Frog

Paul Muldoon (1951) - *Quoof* (1983)

1 Comes to mind as another small upheaval  
2 amongst the rubble.  
3 His eye matches exactly the bubble  
4 in my spirit-level.  
5 I set aside hammer and chisel  
6 and take him on the trowel.

7 The entire population of Ireland  
8 springs from a pair left to stand  
9 overnight in a pond  
10 in the gardens of Trinity College,  
11 two bottles of wine left there to chill  
12 after the Act of Union.

13 There is, surely, in this story  
14 a moral. A moral for our times.  
15 What if I put him to my head  
16 and squeezed it out of him,  
17 like the juice of freshly squeezed limes,  
18 or a lemon sorbet?

## A SHORTENED HISTORY IN PICTURES

Jamie McKendrick (1955) - *The Marble Fly* (1997)

- 1 The Child Maximilian in a White Frock.
- 2 The Imperial Family with their Chairs and Pet Cat.
- 3 Maximilian, a Thoughtful Young Man in Black.
- 4 Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico, at Court.
- 5 The Empress of Mexico, his Wife Charlotte.
- 6 The Emperor Maximilian on Horseback.
- 7 Maximilian and his Court Playing Cricket
- 8 (with the English Ambassador, Sir Charles Wyke).
  
- 9 The Broken Cacti and the Convent's Outer Wall.
- 10 The Execution Squad Standing to Attention.
- 11 A Mestizo Leading a Llama under Popocatepetl.
- 12 The Execution of Miramón, Mejía and Maximilian.
- 13 The Gold-Green Tail-Feathers of the Quetzal.
- 14 The Emperor's Shirt after his Execution.

Frans Masereel The Idea

Kelvin Corcoran (1956) – *Lyric Lyric* (1993)

1 The man sat at an empty table,  
2 his mind enmeshed in a web.  
3 She's already there, perfect,  
4 naked, light emblazons her.

5 Her beauty is undimmed,  
6 no man can handle it.  
7 Fornication and commerce  
8 continue unabated.

9 Lettered, sent abroad,  
10 translated, manifold, athletic;  
11 against perverts and capital  
12 her beauty is undimmed.

13 Off the public corridor  
14 a room of rotting paper  
15 shaped into blocks, printed  
16 in the Schiele typeface.

17 She read the sign  
18 and hit the wall  
19 with a flat palm,  
20 three times evenly.

21 What do you want?  
22 A photograph?  
23 Rain, burning eyes, music  
24 sports the clouds of May.

## St Catherine and the Philosophers

Matthew Francis (1956) – *Dragons* (2001)

1 This is a painting with five books in it.  
2 The young woman stands with her back to the philosophers  
3 who have their backs to the window. They are reading,  
4 ignoring the passers-by who are reading them.  
5 Behind them all we can see the rest of the palace,  
6 a harbour, a mountain, the landscape going blue.

7 The first book is a guide to Purgatory,  
8 the spiral mountain. The only escape is up,  
9 but you have to know the way. This book will tell you.  
10 It takes three men to read it, and first of all  
11 you need the guide to the book. It's in your hand,  
12 uncrumple it. Or you could just turn round  
13 and see if you can untwist the rocks themselves.

14 The second is the book of Good and Evil.  
15 If you read two pages at once you get the world  
16 exactly as it is. The red and black  
17 figures twitch into life as you flicker through them.

18 The third book was originally a baby  
19 but a sorceress appeared at his christening  
20 and turned his skin to leather and his cries  
21 to hieroglyphs. No one has told the priest,  
22 or else he blesses it anyway, not knowing  
23 what happens when it grows up, in Chapter 20.

24 The fourth book is so real that Catherine holds it  
25 in an insulating cloth. It gives the low-down  
26 on the philosophers, how without looking  
27 they can tell everything about the world  
28 except what she is doing there. She knows.

29 The fifth is the perfect book. It is written

30 in a language only it can understand,  
31 but it's bored with reading itself. It lies around  
32 yawning all day, leaving itself undone.

33 The king and the man he talks to have given up books.  
34 There is so much else for them to do, hill walking,  
35 crowd control, sailing, palace architecture.  
36 The king explains that he has hired a sculptor  
37 to describe the future in a marble frieze  
38 above their heads. No one has read it yet,  
39 and even Catherine doesn't know that the wheel  
40 in that little panel up there has her name on it.

## Ode to Antonio Gaudí

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

1 When I first saw  
2 the façade of the Nativity  
3 I laughed, and wanted to cry  
4 and the imp in me itched to say  
5 to the imp in him, 'So this  
6 is what can happen  
7 when parents let little boys  
8 play with sand!'

9 But it was not like the work  
10 of that other devout man,  
11 Gerald of Wales,  
12 who built cathedrals  
13 in the sand at Tenby,  
14 and grew up to be a bishop.

15 This was about play  
16 more than power,  
17 and more than both,  
18 and as well as both,  
19 it was about wonder,  
20 Gaudí's, and the wonder  
21 of the people (myself  
22 among them) who stood  
23 amused, intrigued,  
24 amazed, and first and most  
25 of all, wondering.

26 This was about being a man  
27 who was a great artist  
28 and a child, who made  
29 a thing that stands, and flows,  
30 and seems to melt and run  
31 and drip, like water

32 or forms that grow in water  
33 and embody its rhythms  
34 and its shapes.

35 The work of a man  
36 who knew the Adoration  
37 of the Serpent and the Beast;  
38 who had seen angels riding  
39 the winds on wineskins;  
40 St Michael with wings  
41 made of peacock feathers,  
42 slaying a monster that lies  
43 on its back exposing  
44 an orange belly, like a newt's.  
45 This man's familiar was  
46 John the Baptist, wide-eyed,  
47 brown-bearded, standing  
48 in a desert of cacti  
49 that leap about him like green flames.

50 And their makers, the makers  
51 of these images, were his people,  
52 the people he belonged to,  
53 with whom, at another time,  
54 he had embroidered  
55 the Tapestry of Creation  
56 using the umbrella pines,  
57 the Catalan soil and fields  
58 for materials and tools.

59 Gaudí of Barcelona,  
60 the city that gave him freedom  
61 to embody such a vision  
62 and most deserves his blessing.

63 He died, the great work  
64 unfinished,  
65 and because of that  
66 more natural, more  
67 a place to play in,



68 and laugh and cry  
69 and wonder at the maker,  
70 man-child, and his praise  
71 in the body of Creation  
72 that begins and has no end.

## THE DIVER

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Master of the Leaping Figures* (1987)

(To William Walker, whose work on the foundations of Winchester Cathedral from  
1906 to 1911 saved the building.)

### 1

- 1 This was a great cross, shaken,
- 2 an ancient decaying tree.
- 3 A foundering ship, breaking her back,
- 4 Titanic of the watermeadows---
- 5 except for him.
  
- 6 He descended each day
- 7 to the pitch of death.
- 8 Enshrined stillness, turbulence of prayer,
- 9 rested on him.
  
- 10 In darkness, with dockyard skill,
- 11 he made the foundations sound.
  
- 12 And rose through the graveyard each evening.

### 2

- 13 He rises here still.
  
- 14 He is The Diver:
- 15 fish bowl and goggle eyes.
- 16 More weird, friendlier, than a mason's monster.
- 17 Ropes and pre-war innocence
- 18 hang about him.
- 19 His globe swims through chaos.
- 20 He walks alive among the dead.

21 He stands here too,  
22 with builders whose face he saved:  
23 a workman offering his hands.

Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen

Ian Duhig (1954) - *The Bradford Count* (1991)

Dismissed from Tlaltizapa for changing sex  
Manuel Palafox sulked in Arenista. At markets  
he bought chimoyas, limes and ink from Oaxtepec.  
Some days he wore his twenty-ounce sombrero,  
deerskin pants and "charro" boots. On others  
gold-embroidered blouses and red kerseymere skirts.

He wrote to Magonistas: 'Zapata is finished.  
He takes orders from Obregon. Rally the Peones!  
Death to Carranza! Tierra y Libertad!'  
He wrote to Lenin: 'Trotsky is finished.  
Seek concord with the Ukraine Makhnovshchina.  
Brest-Litovsk's a cock-up. Regards to the Missus.'

He wrote to Freud: 'Were you coked when you dreamt up this?  
No Mexican has even heard of the sexual revolution.  
All Eros last year now it's Thanatos, bloody Thanatos.  
Jung was right - grow a beard, you think you're Moses.  
I hope your jaw drops off. Regards to the Missus.'  
At last he wrote to Yeats: 'Dear Willie, how's the Vision?

Mine's double, ha-ha, Shit. Willie, I'm finished  
in Mexico - it's full of bigots. Ireland can't be worse.  
I'll work. Your brother paints - I'll hold his ladders.  
You can have my poems. The one about this year –  
change it round - it'll do for Ireland. What happened  
to my lift with Casement? Willie, GET ME OUT OF HERE!'

Shopping in Cashel for pulque, Michael Robartes -  
'Research Assistant to a popular writer' -  
itched in his Connemara Cloth. Himself well-known  
for a Special Devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe,  
he frowned on local talk of a drunken madwoman  
in red skirts, publicly disputing with the bishop.

Marc Chagall, *Over the Town*

Tom Paulin (1949) - The Wind Dog (1999)

1 Marc and Bella  
2 are flying happily over Vitebsk  
3 ---they've shucked off the iron husk  
4 of place  
5 and like two salmon trout  
6 've leapt high above the flood  
7 above war revolutions pogroms  
8 ---this is a real a shining good  
9 but if you look closely there's a lout  
10 squatting on the mud  
11 near the fence  
12 ---like a Brueghel peasant  
13 he's laying a turd  
14 at the edge of their wedding party  
15 and it isn't hard  
16 to know how serious his face  
17 and his bare bum are  
18 though many a reproduction  
19 mars this famous painting  
20 by omitting not just his arse  
21 but the entire squatting lout  
22 whose absence reminds me  
23 how quite a few  
24 critics of T. S. Eliot  
25 choose  
26 either to forgive or forget  
27 those bits of verse  
28 and one piece  
29 of coldly sinister prose  
30 that're about  
31 his fear and hatred of all Jews

## GRETТА BOWEN'S EMENDATIONS

Michael Longley - *The Ghost Orchid* (1990-94)

Eighty when she first created pictures, Gretta Bowen  
Postponed the finishing touches, and then in her nineties  
Emended her world by painting on the glass that covered  
Children's games, fairgrounds, swans on a pond, interiors  
Not brush-strokes to erase her studious reflection  
But additional leaves and feathers falling on to ice.

## Three Brueghel Paintings

Clive Wilmer (1945) - *Of Earthly Paradise* (1992)

### I

- 1 This is the world (the painter says)
- 2 Reduced by ice and snow, bone-bare.
- 3 Then ride in mercenaries.
- 4 Armed to the teeth, they introduce
- 5 Fear, panic and despair.
- 6 They'd trace a king. How can they know
- 7 He is not here?

### II

- 8 Where earth encounters heaven, cloud
- 9 Frays on the trees that spike the air.
- 10 Ranks crumble to a crowd
- 11 Of stragglers. Some, bemused and dazed
- 12 By light's intrusion, stare
- 13 At one the light has felled, who sees
- 14 What is not there.

### III

- 15 No myth informs this wintry view
- 16 Enhanced by no nostalgic care
- 17 For skies of southern blue.
- 18 Skaters delight in circumstance
- 19 Three hunters come to share,
- 20 Who slant against winds charged with snow
- 21 From who knows where.

After Rembrandt: *Saul and David*

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

1 The beautiful young man plays,  
2 absorbed in the music he is making.

3 And the king listens---  
4 there is only a curtain between them,  
5 he could reach out,  
6 touch David on the shoulder,  
7 speak his love.

8 Saul hears, and his face  
9 is haggard, stricken.  
10 The music is close---  
11 he could reach out,  
12 he could touch the strings---  
13 but he hears it where he sits,  
14 deep inside himself,  
15 music he was once part of,  
16 that sounds now  
17 eternally distant,  
18 beyond the ramparts of paradise.



After Rembrandt: *The Anatomical Lesson*

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

1 It is one life  
2 that shines in the dark eyes  
3 of the surgeons who are bending  
4 over the cadaver---  
5 one life, unique in each.

6 The eyes of the dead man  
7 are closed, his mouth  
8 slightly open---  
9 the mystery  
10 has left this dead flesh

11 but shows in the eyes of the living,  
12 in those who look down  
13 at the exposed tendon,  
14 the dissected arm,  
15 or thoughtfully aside,

16 and in the face of the man  
17 who looks at us,  
18 wondering about himself,  
19 mystified.

20 It is not yet only  
21 a scientific question  
22 that dawns in his dark eyes.

23 What is man? What am I  
24 who am wonderfully  
25 and fearfully made,  
26 like this dead thing?

Edvard Munch: *The Sick Child*

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

*Disease, insanity and death were the angels  
which attended my cradle.*

1 North is a dark green sea  
2 which the boy shaking on the bed  
3 was born to.

4                   He is wrack  
5 opening and shutting in the tide;  
6 a ribbed shell dragged down  
7 which waves knock  
8 and the brine swills;

9 a mariner who will not drown.

10                   Angels  
11 attend him into the cold:

12 a woman the sea has broken on  
13 bowing her down;  
14 a girl with red hair, face  
15 fragile as a moon  
16 that floats out on the dark.

Leonardo draws Bernardo Bandini  
*(hanged for the murder of Giuliano de Medici)*

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *Sighting the Slave Ship* (1992)

You noted the costume  
as if compiling an inventory:  
tan-coloured cap,  
doublet of black serge,  
dark hose;  
red-stippled velvet  
at the swinging neck.

How cool a faculty,  
when you bequeathed  
no silver instruments of surgery,  
but drew  
soft against stopped heart,  
*a blue coat lined*  
*with fur of foxes' breasts.*

Vincent

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

1 In the north  
2 he goes among the people,  
3 farmers, women who cut the peat.  
4 He is a peasant-painter labouring  
5 to paint peasants.

6 He is somewhere in the room  
7 with them, struggling to paint  
8 the hands they dig with,  
9 and put in the dish, and share out their portion.

Darkness

comes out of the earth in the north.  
It moulds the figures,  
it shapes the farms.  
This is the good soil of Holland,  
the soil the poor live on.  
It means hardship, not misery,  
not the dry, dusty wind of the Borinage.  
The cold wall of the church  
chills him to the spine,  
he is a servant  
of the man-forsaken god,  
a light-bringer  
who loves the dark.

24 Earth is new in the south---bright yellow,  
25 vermilion, burgundy, violet,  
26 sky blue, bright green.  
27 Earth melts, burns with a flame  
28 that does not destroy but restores.  
29 This is the force life lives by,  
30 the force he seeks to enter.

31 The sun roars in the harvest field.

32 He holds the yellow note,  
33 the black cypress is a vortex  
34 and the heavens rain down fire.

35 Gauguin paints him painting sunflowers,  
36 in which he sees himself 'gone mad'.

37 He paints irises in the asylum garden,  
38 tongues wagging, the silence  
39 loud with shouts and screams.

40 He has gone out of hearing,  
41 he is somewhere deep in the fields,

42 a stranger in a foreign land.

The Blue Beret  
(after Rembrandt)

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *Sighting the Slave Ship* (1992)

In the *Raising of the Cross*  
you painted yourself  
in a blue beret  
assisting at the crucifixion.

Is death  
so fixed a tincture  
none at the atrocity  
escape recognition?

Soft –  
even now  
in the *Descent by Torchlight*  
you help him down,

wearing neither beret  
nor doublet,  
but bodies  
interlaced

for flesh  
is the outlandish dress  
at the recurring  
deposition.

Bathers, 1930

*(from a photograph by George Hoyningen-Huene)*

Maura Dooley (1957) – *Explaining Magnetism* (1991)

Staring so intently out to sea  
they do not hear the stealthy camera  
click like a key in a lock.

His hair is thick, sticky with salt.  
Her hair is shingled. Their skins take a dip  
in June sunlight. The air, the mood is blue.

The rest is out of focus; an ocean corrugates  
and concertinas, the wind is a held breath,  
the horizon too distant to believe in.

Their faces turned from us, they balance  
on the edge of a narrow jetty. We look at them,  
in black and white, from a long way off.

Language

Annemarie Austin (1943) – *Door upon Door* (1999)

In these photographs the dead soldiers  
have all the vulnerability of children  
asleep in postures of abandonment.  
Arms thrown wide. Legs sprawled.

Until their time lays claim to them.  
This is December 1942.  
It is the Russian Front.  
These are German corpses.

So the picture of this youth  
whose head is forced to crook  
against the sheer side of an open grave,  
whose shirt is undone at his throat,  
whose tunic is unbuttoned  
under a powdering of light-coloured earth  
or snow

is labelled  
'*Lebensraum* for one more Nazi'.

This other spread-eagled face down,  
dark shape in his winter padding,  
bears a thin line of brilliant fire  
along one arm and  
working on his back.

His caption reads: 'The enemy:  
one of the Fascist robbers is halted,  
and on his tank the flame springs up  
that will burn him and all his kind.'



## ON A PHOTOGRAPH OF CHEKHOV

Christopher Middleton (1926) - *Intimate Chronicles* (1996)

---for Katharina Wagenbach

- 1 While the rain comes pouring down,
- 2 Chekhov, in his white peaked hunting cap,
- 3 And prone beside a rick of hay, surveys
- 4 The scene behind the camera, narrow-eyed.
- 5 While in Berlin the rain comes pouring down
- 6 And will refresh the yellowed centenarian
- 7 Blossomer in the courtyard, Chekhov has
- 8 Anchored his umbrella, gone to earth.
- 9 Ivory handle of the slim umbrella shaft atilt
- 10 To birch trunks in the background, has a curve;
- 11 Eyesight arching clean across the image
- 12 Divines, in the cap's white crown, a twin to it.
- 13 Chekhov's brother, meanwhile, props his head---
- 14 Summer rain, phenomenally somber---
- 15 On Chekhov's hip; from his blubber mouth
- 16 A howl escapes, the sockets of his eyes
- 17 Are black, as if he wore, beneath his bowler,
- 18 Smoked eyeglasses; as if he were, perhaps,
- 19 A horror Chekhov carried on his back, and still
- 20 The rain comes pouring down, and the umbrella,
- 21 Hulk become a dome to shelter Chekhovs, both,
- 22 Can float across a century, be put to use.
- 23 O perishable hayrick!---and its fringe,
- 24 Where Chekhov tucks his knees up, will be damp.

25 Yet Chekhov's massive cap, laundered a day ago---  
26 Intent beneath its peak his eyes are watching  
27 How people make their gestures through the rain,  
28 Set dishes on a table, turn

29 Vacant faces to the window, wring their hands,  
30 Cling, so predisposed, to their fatal fictions,  
31 Or stroke the living air, to make it hum  
32 With all they mean to talk about today.

The Burgomaster's Daughter  
(*Leipzig, 1945*)

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *The Wound-dresser's Dream* (1996)

Why do they wait  
the soldiers at the door,  
she on the black-buttoned  
sofa alone?

The light falls on her lapels  
like drinkable gold,  
the fillings in her teeth  
red-gold as her hair.

Why don't they flinch  
the allies at the door?  
*O make my bed father*  
*for I fain would lie down.*

Portrait of Henry V by an Unknown Artist  
John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

Behind the bodkin nose  
and shadowy curve  
of occiput  
is a draw-weight  
of thirteen years,  
of which the pursed lips  
and brass basilisk  
eye are sale evidence:  
an eye which, seeing  
the French emissary  
beg consideration  
for twelve thousand  
women and children  
refugees,  
stays blind -  
though open, as if  
it were looking back-  
wards and could sense  
the grip of a fist  
around the neck's  
smug folds, or  
a paternal tweak  
to that monkish crop –  
as if it had long known  
the source of its pain,  
but longed to glimpse,  
further back,  
the figure without a crown  
drawing his  
vengeful bowstring.

Charles I on Horseback  
(Van Dyck)

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

The King sits rigid, in chalky  
bewilderment: his favourite grey  
has just trotted calmly through a grove  
and into a green morass, been swallowed,  
and left him astride a nightmare  
whose outline still glares at him, carved white  
on that imaginary hillside opposite.

The dark equerry, the smiling equerry,  
so quick to come to His Majesty's rescue,  
has offered him now a fresh and hugely  
muscular mount - more like a boulder  
weathered to an approximate horse shape,  
its miniature head protruding trimly  
from a landscape of burial chambers.

The King tries to laugh - this monster  
should be before a plough; or hauling some load  
home from harvest; at any rate, securely anchored  
against such poundings out of the earth  
as have today snatched his best horse from under him -  
till a sanguine half-smile rising near the oak  
assures him that this is a very tranquil bay.

The dark equerry, the crimson equerry  
on whom the King turns his back,  
pretends that he must just once more polish  
His Majesty's helmet before releasing him;  
meanwhile, has concealed a flint or a frog's bone  
in the crest, breathing into its restive  
royal feathers the ancient Horseman's Word.

## Piranesi's Fever

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *Sighting the Slave Ship* (1992)

It could have been malaria -  
the ricochet of the pulse  
along his outflung arm,  
grappling-irons  
at each cautery-point on the body.

She lay with him between bouts;  
pressed to his temple  
the lazy estuary of her wrist;  
brought him myrrh  
on a burning salver.

How lucid they made him,  
the specifics against fever:  
the magnified footfall of the physician,  
the application of cupping-glasses  
above the echoing stairwell,

windlass and shaft,  
the apparatus of imaginary prisons;  
a catwalk slung across the vault  
for those who will never take  
the drawbridge to the hanging-garden.

None of this he could tell her-  
that those he glimpsed  
rigging the scaffold  
were not fresco-painters,  
but inquisitors giddy from blood-letting;

that when he clung to her  
it wasn't delirium  
but a fleeting humour of the eye -  
unspecified torture,  
death as an exact science.

Only after each crisis, could he speak

of the sudden lit elision  
as she threw back the shutters  
and he felt the weight of sunlight  
on her unseen breasts.

Watteau's Crucifixion

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *Sighting the Slave Ship* (1992)

Master of ambiguity –  
what lovely conspiracy  
did you make of crucifixion  
in a southern landscape?

Was the cross snakewood,  
angels rippling  
against alluvial gold  
like a new shift of sails?

Is that Gilles  
sanguine under eclipse  
who cannot lift the body  
for weight of myrrh?

Do the mourning women  
wear slipper-satin  
of a yellow  
that physics sparrowhawks?

Did you take  
straight vermilion  
for the electuary  
of wounds?

Do you know whether  
the pilgrimage is over  
or why the Magdalen  
embarks in fugitive red?

Did you sanction her  
to crouch below  
the male half-nude  
and weeping

slip her hand  
between his legs?



